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**Embroidered Rhetoric: The Social, Religious and
Political Functions of Elite Women's Needlework,
c.1560-1630**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

University of Warwick, Department of English and Comparative Literary
Studies

July 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	page 4
Acknowledgements	13
Declaration and Inclusion of Material from a Prior Thesis	14
Abstract	15
List of Abbreviations	16
Embroidered Rhetoric: The Social, Religious and Political Functions of Elite Women's Needlework, c.1560-1630	
Methodological Preface	i
Introduction	17
Chapter One: Embroidering in a Social Context	44
I: Needlework as Mediator: Embroidering a Social Identity	47
i: Education and Housewifery	47
ii: Needlework in the Country House	50
iii: Needlework-as-practice and Needlework-as-object: Embroidering the Virtuous Persona	54
II: Needlework as Relationship: Embroidering Social Connections	64
III: Valuing Needlework: Embroidering Wealth	79
IV: The Needlework of Intellect: Actively Embroidering a <i>Vita Contemplativa</i>	98
Case Study: Embroidering a Virtuous Persona: The Needlework of Bess of Hardwick	118
I: The Virtuous Wife	126
II: The Virtuous Widow	136
III: Appropriating the Masculine Virtues	141
Chapter Two: Embroidering Faith	148
I: Living with the enemy: Catholics in the Public View	158
II: The Queen of Scots: ' <i>Marie Stuart, Tu as martyre</i> '	169
i: Execution-as-martyrdom	170
ii: Divinely-sanctioned treason	178
iii: Transmission	184

III: Catholics on the Continent	188
IV: Invisible stitches: The Catholic recusants	200
Case Study: Embroidering a Personal Liturgy: The Vestments of Helena Wintour	214
I: 'For this particular Mission, or the intended College': Wintour's intentions	221
II: 'A <i>Garden</i> of al flowers': Meditations on the Virgin	226
III: <i>Veni Sanctvs Spiritvs</i> : The Iconography of Personal Devotion	245
Chapter Three: Embroidering Politics	253
I: Arbella Stuart: Embroidering the Currency of Patronage	259
i: The Grateful Gift and the Language of Patronage	263
ii: The Graceful Gift and the 'Blessed Chain of Amity'	283
II: The Graceful Masque: The Needlework Gift in Samuel Daniel's <i>Tethys Festival</i>	288
III: Anne Clifford: Embroidering a Feminine Commonwealth	301
IV: 'Sylent Rhetoricke' in a Feminine Commonwealth: Embroidery in Robert White's <i>Cupid's Banishment</i>	318
Case Study: Embroidering a Royal Relationship: the Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots	335
I: 'Evidence of the honour I bear her': Mary's Needlework Gifts to Elizabeth	336
II: <i>Pulchriori Detur</i> : Negotiating a Meeting	343
III: <i>Et lepores devicto insultant Leone</i> : Figuring Resistance in Captivity	360
IV: <i>Virescit Vulnere Virtus</i> : The Norfolk Panel	372
Conclusion	384
Sources for Illustrations	390
Bibliography	391

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures for the introduction are denoted by the upper case letter ‘I’, those for Chapter One are denoted by the Arabic numeral ‘1’.

Location of works of art illustrated here are indicated where known, and where not known the name of the owner is given.

INTRODUCTION

	following page
Fig. I.1. Mary, Queen of Scots (?): embroidered panel for a skirt (private collection)	18
Fig. I.2. Bess of Hardwick et al.: appliqué hanging of Artemisia flanked by patience and charity (Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire)	18
Fig. I.3a. Helena Wintour: Alleluia chasuble, front (Stonyhurst College)	19
Fig. I.3b. Alleluia chasuble, back	19
Fig. I.4. Detail of Alleluia chasuble showing gold ring enclosing Wintour family heraldry and embroidered ‘ <i>Orate pro me</i> Helena Wintovr’	20
Fig. I.5. Detail of Alleluia chasuble showing gold ring enclosing family heraldry and embroidered ‘ <i>Omnia Desvper</i> 1655’	20

CHAPTER ONE: NEEDLEWORK AND SOCIETY

Fig. 1.1. Jan van Belcamp (?): Appleby Triptych. Oil on panel, 1646 (Appleby Castle, Cumbria)	44
Fig. 1.2. Central panel of Appleby Triptych, <i>The Great Picture</i>	44
Fig. 1.3. Left hand panel of Appleby Triptych, Anne Clifford aged fifteen	45
Figs. 1.4a - b. George Gower: Sir Francis and Lady Elizabeth Willoughby. 1573 (Lord Middleton)	52
Fig. 1.5. Two purses, (left, with pincushion) embroidered with rose and pansies, (right) with rose, pansy, carnation, honeysuckle and grapes. Early 17th c (Victoria and Albert Museum)	56
Fig. 1.6. Attr. William Segar: Elizabeth Verney, Mrs Palmer, wearing gown embroidered with emblematic pillars. Panel painting, c. 1590 (Parham Park)	62
Fig. 1.7. ‘Plus Ultra’ emblem from Claude Paradin’s <i>Devises Heroiques</i>	62
Fig. 1.8. Valance for a bed showing Philomel embroidering her history (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)	64
Fig. 1.9. Dorothy Selby: ‘The Double Deliveraunce’. Tent-stitch picture,	65

	after 1621 (private collection)	
Fig. 1.10.	Bess of Hardwick: Cavendish hanging central panel showing emblem of tears falling on quicklime with conventional mourning symbols in borders. 1570 (Hardwick Hall)	69
Fig. 1.11.	The Lewkenor Table Carpet, dated 1564 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)	71
Fig. 1.12.	Nightcap embroidered with daffodils, roses, pansies, acorns etc. Silk and silver thread, silver spangles and bobbin thread, early 17th c (Burrell Collection, Glasgow)	75
Fig. 1.13.	Elizabeth I: needlework bookcover for <i>The Miroir; or Glasse of the Synnefull Soul</i> . Filigree of gold and silver wire on blue corded silk, 1544 (Bodleian Library)	75
Fig. 1.14.	Artist unknown: Lady Bridget Willoughby. c.1610 (Lord Middleton)	77
Fig. 1.15.	Attr. William Larkin: Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset. Oil on canvas, 1613 (English Heritage)	81
Fig. 1.16.	Passementerie: gold and silver bobbin lace, mid-16th c (Hardwick Hall)	83
Fig. 1.17.	Detail of Fig. 1.6. Embroidered ruff with ‘antiquities’: ragged staves and spotted serpents in black and white silk	83
Fig. 1.18.	One of eight crimson velvet panels made for Bess of Hardwick with applied strapwork design in cloth of gold and silver interwoven with embroidered heraldic motifs and initials E[lizabeth] S[hrewsbury] (Hardwick Hall)	89
Fig. 1.19.	Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge)	91
Fig. 1.20.	Slips of honeysuckle and pinks. Black silk on white linen, gold thread edging, c. 1585-1600 (present whereabouts unknown)	92
Fig. 1.21.	Table carpet, c.1580 (Hatfield House)	98
Fig. 1.22.	Nicholas Hillard: Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Miniature on vellum, c. 1590 (National Portrait Gallery)	104
Fig. 1.23.	Mary Boyle Rich, Dowager Countess of Warwick, aged 53	104
Fig. 1.24.	Right-hand panel of Appleby triptych, Anne Clifford aged 56	112

CASE STUDY: BESS OF HARDWICK

Fig. B.1.	Follower of Hans Eworth: Bess of Hardwick as Lady Cavendish (Hardwick Hall)	118
Fig. B.2.	Robert Smythson for Bess of Hardwick: Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire	118
Fig. B.3.	Bess of Harwick and Mary, Queen of Scots: Oxburgh Hangings in the King’s Room at Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk (now displayed in darkened anteroom)	124

Fig. B.4.	Shrewsbury hanging	124
Fig. B.5	Central panel of Shrewsbury hanging showing ‘ <i>Ingenii Largitor</i> ’ emblem adapted from Claude Paradin’s <i>Devises Heroiques</i>	125
Fig. B.6.	‘ <i>Ingenij largitor</i> ’ emblem from Claude Paradin, <i>Devises Heroiques</i> , Lyons, 1557	125
Fig. B.7.	Detail of Lucretia hanging showing Chastity with sprig of myrtle and unicorn	129
Fig. B.8.	Detail of Judgement of Paris table carpet showing unicorn in border (Hardwick Hall)	129
Fig. B.9.	Detail of Story of Tobit table carpet showing myrtle in border (Hardwick Hall)	129
Fig. B.10.	Detail of Judgement of Paris table carpet showing <i>cestus</i> -like fabric tying foliage branches together in border	130
Fig. B.11.	Detail of Shrewsbury Hanging showing ‘Porphyry’ panel, cut, on right hand side	130
Fig. B.12.	Detail of Lucretia hanging showing Liberality with cornucopia	130
Fig. B.13.	Detail of Rose with Antics table carpet showing winged cornucopia, carnation and winged heart (Hardwick Hall)	130
Fig. B.14.	Detail of Shrewsbury hanging showing ‘Crocodil’ panel, left	130
Fig. B.15.	attr. John Balechouse, <i>The Return of Ulysses to Penelope</i> . Oil on canvas, 1570 (Hardwick Hall)	131
Fig. B.16.	Detail of Penelope hanging showing Penelope with hand resting on roll of cloth	133
Fig. B.17.	Plaster frieze of Diana, High Great Chamber, Hardwick Hall	134
Fig. B.18.	Long cushion of Actaeon and Diana (Hardwick Hall)	134
Fig. B.19	Faith from a set of Virtues appliqué hangings (Hardwick Hall)	134
Fig. B.20	Table Carpet depicting Judgement of Paris, dated 1570	134
Fig. B.21	‘Wifely fidelity’: emblem 191 from Alciato’s <i>Emblemata Liber</i>	134
Fig. B.22	Heraldic panel with Hardwick stag and ES monogram. Velvet with applied strapwork and floral sprigs (Hardwick Hall)	136
Fig. B.23	Central panel of Cavendish Hanging showing ‘ <i>Extinctam lachrimae testantur vivere flammam</i> ’ emblem	136
Fig. B.24	Antoine Caron: <i>Les Placets: Artemisia Receiving Petitions</i> , pen and ink wash (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)	136
Fig. B.25	Detail of Artemisia hanging showing Pero suckling her father Myco	142
Fig. B.26	Detail of Shrewsbury hanging showing a ‘Stork of the Montaynes’, left	142
Fig. B.27	Detail of Zenobia hanging showing Zenobia with lance and helmet	142
Fig. B.28a	Detail of Shrewsbury hanging showing a ‘Crane’	144

Fig. B.28b	Detail of Cavendish hanging showing a ‘Camel’	144
Fig. B.29	Detail of Story of Tobit table carpet showing painter’s and embroiderer’s tools weighed on scales in border	144
Fig. B.30	Detail of Zodiac panels showing the Sign of Cancer (Hardwick Hall)	146
Fig. B.31	Detail of Liberal Arts panels showing Arithmetic (Hardwick Hall)	146

CHAPTER TWO: NEEDLEWORK AND RELIGION

Fig. 2.1	Sadler’s Company Pall. Early 16th c (Victoria and Albert Museum)	149
Fig. 2.2	Altar-dossal depicting the Last Supper. c.1633 (Victoria and Albert Museum)	151
Fig. 2.3	Culpepper altar cloth (Hollingbourne Church, Kent)	151
Fig. 2.4	Stump work panel depicting the story of David and Bathsheba. Silk, metal thread and wooden moulds, 1665 (Lady Lever Gallery)	155
Fig. 2.5	William Byrd taking part in Elizabeth’s funeral procession (BM Add MS 35342, fol. 31v)	164
Fig. 2.6	Sheldon cushion cover depicting Flight into Egypt. 16th c (Victoria and Albert Museum)	165
Fig. 2.7	Sheldon long cushion cover depicting Annunciation, Adoration of Shepherds and Adoration of Kings. 16th c (Metropolitan Museum of Art)	165
Fig. 2.8	Sheldon armorial tapestry woven for Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Wool and silk, 1584-85 (Victoria and Albert Museum)	166
Fig. 2.9	P. Oudry (?): Sheffield Portrait of Mary Queen of Scots	170
Fig. 2.10	Contemporary sketch of Great Hall in Fotheringhay Castle, 8 February 1587, showing Mary Stuart entering (left) and disrobing (centre) (British Museum)	174
Fig. 2.11	Mary Stuart: ‘Phenix’ panel, Marian hanging	176
Fig. 2.12	Mary Stuart: ‘ <i>Non Inferiora Secvtvs</i> ’ octagon panel, Marian hanging	177
Fig. 2.13	‘ <i>Non inferiora sequutus</i> ’ emblem, Paradin, <i>Devises Heroiques</i> . (get better from Paradin book)	177
Fig. 2.14	‘ <i>Donec totum impleat orbem</i> ’ emblem, Paradin, <i>Devises Heroiques</i>	177
Fig. 2.15	‘ <i>Dederitne viam casus’ve Deus’ve</i> ’ emblem, Paradin, <i>Devises Heroiques</i>	177
Fig. 2.16	Mary Stuart: Norfolk Panel, Marian hanging (Oxburgh Hall)	179
Fig. 2.17	Detail of Norfolk Panel	180
Fig. 2.18	Mary Stuart: ‘Butterflies’ panel, Marian hanging	181
Fig. 2.19	Mary Stuart: ‘Tvrrel dove’ panel, Marian hanging	181

Fig. 2.20	‘Beaver’ panel on portion of valance, 4th Oxburgh hanging (Oxburgh Hall)	181
Fig. 2.21	Mary Stuart: ‘ <i>Las pennas passan y queda la speranza</i> ’ panel (Victoria and Albert Museum)	186
Fig. 2.22	Syon Cope (Victoria and Albert Museum)	188
Fig. 2.23	Helena Wintour: chalice veil (private collection)	196
Fig. 2.24	Pedler’s Vestment, 16th or 17th c (Wardour Chapel)	211
Fig. 2.25	Sheldon tapestry valence with hunting detail (Victoria and Albert Museum)	212

CASE STUDY: HELENA WINTOUR

Fig. W.1.	Helena Wintour: Alleluia chasuble (Stonyhurst College)	217
Fig. W.2.	Helena Wintour: Deacon’s dalmatic (Stonyhurst College)	217
Fig. W.3.	Helena Wintour: red chasuble (Stonyhurst College)	217
Fig. W.4.	Helena Wintour: High Mass cope (Stonyhurst College)	217
Fig. W.5.	Helena Wintour: ‘peasecod’ white chasuble (private collection)	217
Fig. W.6.	Helena Wintour: black chasuble (private collection)	217
Fig. W.7.	Helena Wintour: green chasuble (private collection)	217
Fig. W.8.	Purple chasuble with medieval wool embroidery (private collection)	217
Fig. W.9.	Detail of cope showing sacred monogram surmounted by the word ‘ <i>Trivmphanti</i> ’	219
Fig. W.10.	Detail of subdeacon’s dalmatic showing eagle and chicks, surmounted by the word ‘ <i>Ad Maiorem</i> ’	219
Fig. W.11.	Detail of MRA monogram on the peasecod chasuble showing garnets, pearls, metal thread and sequins	222
Fig. W.12.	Detail of dove’s wing on the red chasuble showing pearls, seed pearls and folded silver ribbon	222
Fig. W.13.	Detail of enamel jewels	222
Fig. W.14.	Detail of purple chasuble showing St Anne teaching the Virgin to read	224
Fig. W.15.	Detail of purple chasuble showing St Catherine, patron saint of female scholars	224
Fig. W.16.	Detail of red chasuble showing AMDG motto with Wintour’s initials	224
Fig. W.17.	Detail of peasecod chasuble showing IHS monogram in rays of glory	225
Fig. W.18.	Detail of black chasuble showing XA and IG monograms	225
Fig. W.19.	Detail of peasecod chasuble showing XA monogram.	225

Fig. W.20.	Title page of Henry Hawkins' <i>Partheneia Sacra</i> (Amsterdam, 1633)	226
Fig. W.21.	Francisco de Zurbarán, <i>The Young Virgin</i> (1635-40) (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)	227
Fig. W.22.	Detail of peasecod chasuble. Iris showing gradations of colour achieved with silk threads	228
Fig. W.23.	Detail of green chasuble. Marigold showing gradations of colour achieved with silk threads	228
Fig. W.24.	Detail of cope, showing floral symbols growing in a garden	230
Fig. W.25.	Emblem of the Rose, from Henry Hawkins's <i>Partheneia Sacra</i> .	231
Fig. W.26.	Detail of Subdeacon's dalmatic showing single marigold and vines	231
Fig. W.27.	Detail of cope showing scrolls issuing from garden, ' <i>Orate pro me</i> ' 'Helena Wintovr'	232
Fig. W.28.	Detail of peasecod chasuble showing columbine	232
Fig. W.29.	Detail of Alleluia chasuble showing colour detail on tulip leaf	232
Fig. W.30.	Detail of peasecod chasuble showing rose at various stages of bloom	233
Fig. W.31.	Detail of green chasuble. 'The fires of its Carnation, the snow of the white Satin, the fine Emeralds, cut into little touns round about'	233
Fig. W.32.	Vertical orphrey of pearl-filled peapods and monograms on back of peasecod chasuble	234
Fig. W.33.	Detail of peasecod chasuble showing scrolling peapod design	235
Fig. W.34.	Detail of pomegranate on peasecod chasuble with 'graines disposed in an admirable order'	235
Fig. W.35.	Helena Wintour: Phoenix burse (private collection)	236
Fig. W.36.	Detail of phoenix on burse	236
Fig. W.37.	Back of subdeacon's dalmatic, phoenix under archway bearing the word ' <i>Resurgenti</i> '	236
Fig. W.38.	Detail of deacon's dalmatic, pelican in her piety under archway bearing the word ' <i>Redimenti</i> '	236
Fig. W.39.	MRA monogram on peasecod chasuble showing pierced heart	236
Fig. W.40.	MAR monogram on red chasuble showing pierced heart	236
Fig. W.41.	Front of deacon's dalmatic	237
Fig. W.42.	Detail of deacon's dalmatic. 'The Hen preserves her yong, Protects, & shelters with her wings'	237
Fig. W.43.	Dove on back of red chasuble	238
Fig. W.44.	Dove on front of red chasuble	238
Fig. W.45.	Helena Wintour: red chalice veil showing Pentecostal dove	238
Fig. W.46.	Dove on black chasuble	238

Fig. W.47a.	Front of red Pentecostal chasuble showing grace as dew descending from Holy Spirit through the Virgin to the Wintour family	239
Fig. W.47b.	Back of red Pentecostal chasuble showing grace as dew descending from Holy Spirit through the Virgin to Helena Wintour	239
Fig. W.48	Detail of Pentecostal veil showing dew ornamented with coloured silks and jewels	240
Fig. W.49.	Front of black chasuble	240
Fig. W.50.	Detail of black chasuble showing Marian family monograms	240
Fig. W.51.	Detail of Alleluia chasuble showing pine-cones anchoring Revelations panel	241
Fig. W.52a.	Detail of dove on Pentecostal chasuble	241
Fig. W.52b.	Dove with rainbow breast on black chasuble. 'Her neck being opposed to the Sun will diuersify into a thousand colours, more various than the Iris it-self'	242
Fig. W.53.	Detail of cope showing urn of flowers, with a white, red and purple-red rose top centre, turk's cap lilies bottom left, sunflower bottom right	242
Fig. W.54.	Detail of cope showing crimson lily	244
Fig. W.55.	Detail of cope showing turk's cap lilies	244
Fig. W.56.	Front of Alleluia chasuble with IHS monogram in rays of glory overlaid with gold ring bearing words ' <i>Sit nomen Domini benedictvm in eternvm</i> '	246
Fig. W.57.	Hood of cope with IHS monogram in rays of glory overlaid with gold ring bearing words ' <i>Datvm est nomen qvod est svper omne nomen</i> '	246
Fig. W.58.	Helena Wintour: chalice veil with IHS in rays of glory (private collection)	246
Fig. W.59.	Detail of chalice veil with IHS monogram in gold band bearing words ' <i>Nomen dulce nomen delectabile</i> '	246
Fig. W.60.	Detail of orphreys on cope with golden sequence, ' <i>Veni Sanctus Spiritus, Veni pater pavpervm, Veni dator mvnervm, Veni lvmen cordivm</i> '	246
Fig. W.61.	Detail of red Pentecostal chasuble with text completing the golden sequence, ' <i>Veni Sancte Spiritus, Reple tuorum corda fidelium</i> '	246
Fig. W.62.	Back of Alleluia chasuble showing the ' <i>Alleluia</i> ' scrolls	248
Fig. W.63.	Front of Alleluia chasuble	248
Fig. W.64.	Tulips as crimson-stained chalices on Alleluia chasuble	248
Fig. W.65.	Left-hand orphrey of cope with Te Deum liturgy, ' <i>Dnvs Devs Sabaoth</i> ', ' <i>Plena est orbis terra gloria tua</i> ', ' <i>Sanctus</i> '	250
Fig. W.66.	Right-hand orphrey with Lesser Doxology, ' <i>Gloria Pri et Filio et Spiritu Sancto</i> ', ' <i>Sicvt erat in principio et nunc et semper</i> '	250

Fig. W.67.	Honeysuckle at bottom edge of green chasuble	251
Fig. W.68.	Wintour family and personal heraldic devices within the protection of the Marian garden, with embroidered date '1656' on bridge, and flanking the garden ' <i>Orate pro me</i> ' 'Helena Wintour'	251

CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL NEEDLEWORK

Fig. 3.1.	'C. V. M.': Arbella Stuart. Oil on panel, 1589 (Hardwick Hall)	259
Fig. 3.2.	Coloured cutwork cushion, and detail (inset). Silk and metal thread on linen (Hardwick Hall)	259
Fig. 3.3.	Portrait of unknown woman. Oil on panel (Cowdray Park)	275
Fig. 3.3a.	Detail of Fig. 3.3	275
Fig. 3.4.	' <i>Te stante virebo</i> ' emblem, from Whitney's <i>A Choice of Emblems</i>	275
Fig. 3.5.	' <i>Te stante virebo</i> ' emblem, from Paradin's <i>Devises Heroiques</i>	275
Fig. 3.6.	Sandro Botticelli: ' <i>Primavera</i> ', detail of the Three Graces (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)	286
Fig. 3.7.	Inigo Jones: Design for Tethys or a nymph. Pen and brown ink (Duke of Devonshire)	291
Fig. 3.8.	Inigo Jones: Design for headdress, probably for Anna of Denmark. Pen and brown ink (Duke of Devonshire)	291
Fig. 3.9.	Robert Peake the Elder: Prince Henry with John Harrington. Oil on canvas, 1603 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)	298
Fig. 3.10.	Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger: Queen Anna of Denmark. Oil on canvas, c. 1611-14 (Woburn Abbey)	304
Fig. 3.11.	attr. John de Critz the Elder: King James I. Oil on canvas, 1606 (private collection)	308

CASE STUDY: MARY STUART

Fig. M.1.	Nicholas Hilliard: Mary Stuart. c. 1580 (private collection)	336
Fig. M.2.	Artist unknown: Elizabeth I. Panel painting, c. 1575 (present whereabouts unknown)	336
Fig. M.3.	Embroidered skirt, crimson satin and gold and silver thread (private collection)	336
Fig. M.4.	Mary Stuart: ' <i>Pulchriori detur</i> ' emblem, Marian hanging (Oxburgh Hall)	343
Fig. M.5.	The monogrammist H.E. [Hans Eworth?], 'Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses' (HM the Queen)	343
Fig. M.6.	Judgement of Paris table carpet, border detail of owl (Hardwick Hall)	361

Fig. M.7.	Mary Stuart: ‘Unicorne’ panel, Marian hanging	361
Fig. M.8.	Mary Stuart: ‘Lyone’ panel, Marian hanging	361
Fig. M.9	Mary Stuart, Bess of Hardwick et al., Marian hanging (Oxburgh Hall), with key	362
Fig. M.10.	‘Dragon’ panel, Shrewsbury hanging	362
Fig. M.11.	‘Elephant’ panel, from 4th Oxburgh hanging	362
Fig. M.12.	‘Gleade’ panel, Cavendish hanging	363
Fig. M.13.	Mary Stuart: cushion cover depicting frogs on a well-head (Hardwick Hall)	363
Fig. M.14.	Mary Stuart: cushion cover depicting emblems from Gabriel Faerno	363
Fig. M.15.	Mary Stuart: ‘Tiger’ panel, Marian hanging	365
Fig. M.16.	Mary Stuart: ‘ <i>Dat gloria vires</i> ’ octagon panel, Marian hanging	365
Fig. M.17.	Mary Stuart: ‘Delphin’ panel, Marian hanging	367
Fig. M.18.	‘On one who will perish, from the harshness of his own’: emblem 167 Alciato’s <i>Emblemata Liber</i>	367
Fig. M.19.	‘Estrich’ panel on Cavendish hanging	367
Fig. M.20.	Mary Stuart: Elizabeth/ Mary octagon panel, Marian hanging	371
Fig. M.21.	Mary Stuart: ‘Catte’ panel from 4th Oxburgh hanging	371
Fig. M.22.	Woodcut of a cat, C. Gesner, <i>Icones Animalium</i>	371
Fig. M.23.	Mary Stuart: ‘Norfolk Panel’, central panel of Marian hanging, with ‘ <i>Virescit vulnere virtus</i> ’ emblem	374
Fig. M.24.	Mary Stuart: ‘Sneiles’ panel, Marian hanging	377
Fig. M.25.	Woodcut of snails, C. Gesner, <i>Icones Animalium</i>	377

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Professor Peter Mack for his supervision and friendship over the last eight years. Cheerful and unflappable, he has dispensed invaluable guidance and advice on all aspects of the doctoral experience, and has been unfailingly generous with his time and support. Dr Carol Chillington Rutter has provided both rants and pep talks with love and honesty for more than a decade, and is a challenging and appreciated reader. What I have learned of scholarship I owe to these two.

This thesis was made possible by British Academy funding, and I gratefully acknowledge their financial support.

I thank the staff of the British Library for their courtesy and efficiency. Working in their beautiful buildings, old and new, was both a privilege and a pleasure.

Stonyhurst College, Clitheroe, extended generous hospitality and allowed me to examine their collection of vestments. I am grateful to Father Anthony Symondson at Stonyhurst and Frances Pritchard at the Whitworth Gallery for their time and patience in making the Stonyhurst vestments available. Stonyhurst Curator Jan Grafius was most helpful with tracing manuscript material. I much enjoyed examining and photographing the Lady Wintour set of vestments, and thank the current curators for their warm welcome and assistance. Father Geoffrey Scott of Douai Abbey was an enlightening reader. Grateful thanks also to Dr Penny Carson and Bernadette Morrison-Ebling, intelligent readers, fellow enthusiasts and adventurers to the north.

I thank Stewart Johnson of Malvern College for computer consultation above and beyond the call of duty and friendship, and gratefully acknowledge the use of College resources for preparing illustrations. College staff (and one very clever student) provided much support and French translations.

I am eternally grateful to my dear and wise friend Rosamund Barr for keeping me sane for the past five years. No small achievement, and much appreciated.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my father, Charles Gordon Clark, for many telephone conferences, for ad hoc Latin translations, for dredging up vital information on liturgical issues long-buried in his memory, and for being a valiant and patient sounding board. What larks in the Bodleian!

Since 1999 research would have been impossible without all those who have cared for Oscar with love. To Susie, MEYC, and most especially the one-and-only Gwaia, I owe more than I can say.

Finally, this thesis would not have been written without the unstinting support of Stephen, ever generous with his love, patience, cooking and childcare. Thank you from the heart.

DECLARATION AND INCLUSION OF MATERIAL FROM A PRIOR THESIS

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work.

I first explored the needlework of Mary Stuart in 'Embroidering a Royal Identity: The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Warwick, 1996). In the relevant section of Chapter Two and in the Case Study to Chapter Three much, though not all, material had previously been analysed. Apart from odd sentences here and there, other more substantial parts of paragraphs are adapted or in some cases taken from the prior thesis. This is the case with some material and analysis on pages 39, 172-3, 175-7, 180-3, 342-5, 347-51, 362-4, 366-7, 369-71, 373, 378-9. In almost all cases the analysis has been extended or altered.

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the Elizabethan and Jacobean aristocracy and upper gentry to yield the first detailed study of the elite needleworking woman as fashioner of her social personage, and of the objects she produced as indices of social persona, religious conscience and political agency.

The first chapter explores how needlework mediates between women and their social context. It surveys the way in which needlework, both as practice and as object, functioned as a vehicle for projecting persona and personage into a social context which interpreted needlework according to complex value systems of personal virtue and the husbandries of conspicuous wealth. The chapter explores needlework as a site for intellectual expression. The theories developed in the first chapter are tested in a case study of Bess of Hardwick, whose textiles show her construction of a virtuous aristocratic persona proclaiming its self-assured place in the social hierarchy.

Chapter Two is the first study to consider the needlework of Elizabethan and Jacobean Catholics in the light of the Protestant proscription of iconic vestments. It recovers the history of lost needlework from English convents on the Continent, and of the English recusants' covert provision of vestments to Jesuit missionaries. The first detailed case study of Helena Wintour's vestments reads Wintour's Jesuit-influenced Marian floral emblems and iconography alongside Hawkins's meditation handbook *Partheneia Sacra* to theorise Wintour's devotion to the Immaculate Conception, and explores the vestments' relationship to the liturgy and their iconographical importance to the Mass.

Chapter Three considers needlework gifts as political currency within patronage structures at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts. Narrated with a contemporary vocabulary of grace, needlework gifts contribute to the construction of court-crown relations, symbolised by needlework gifts in Jacobean court masques. Through needlework gifts a 'feminine commonwealth' availed itself of power structures at the court of James's consort that parallel his departments, and the women's political agency in a female political hierarchy is seen encoded within gifts of needlework in the Queen's Court's final masque. The case study uses Mary's needlework gifts to Elizabeth as an index of changes in their relationship. Mary's needlework joins parallel texts such as poetry, portraiture and planned masques in developing an iconographical vocabulary centring on the Judgement of Paris, with which diplomatic negotiations sought to clarify the Queens' relative positions.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
CRS	Catholic Record Society
<i>CSP</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>ELR</i>	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
HMC	Great Britain Historical Manuscript Commission
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
<i>RenQ</i>	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>
<i>SQ</i>	<i>Shakespeare Quarterly</i>
WRO	Worcester Record Office

METHODOLOGICAL PREFACE

Chapter One of this thesis seeks to recover contemporary contexts in which the value of elite domestic needlework was gauged. It notices (below, pp. 81-86) how male-authored literature and social commentary fixed upon elite embroidery as a sign of vice (variously, lechery, lust, unbridled desire, intemperate spending), but how at the same time elite Elizabethan and Jacobean women used their luxury needlework as a sign of their nobility, education, virtue, chastity, industry, skill and domestic thrift (see especially pp. 86-96 below), to name but a few positive values. In seeking to understand how these seemingly incompatible discourses related to one another, the thesis found John Sekora's study *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollet* a useful way of focusing the negative side of the debate.¹ His study also briefly points the way towards an understanding of the philosophical frameworks within which the women themselves used their luxury needlework as a positive sign.

Sekora's exploration of the development of the concept of luxury is ultimately directed at a reading of Smollet's 1771 novel *Humphrey Clinker*, the structure of which, according to Sekora, is underpinned by a charge of luxury levelled against society. In the first chapter of his book, Sekora prepares the ground for his analysis of Smollet with a survey of the development of the notion of luxury from Classical through Christian writers both patristic and medieval to eighteenth century writers (pp. 29-62).

It is at times difficult to tease out the historical thread of Sekora's analysis, and his rapid trawl through the meanings of luxury from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries

¹ John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollet* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Page references in this Preface are given in the text.

yields a less than clear picture. Sekora sometimes asserts that the medieval/renaissance notion of luxury includes such all-encompassing meanings as 'wrath, envy, avarice and pride, as well as lechery' (p. 44), and sometimes that luxury is the deadly sin submission to which leads in a downwards spiral to 'all the deadly sins together' (p. 47). For other Renaissance writers, on the other hand, the term 'luxury' is, confusingly, chiefly associated with 'lust' (p. 46). Luxury is, Sekora freely and frequently admits, an ambiguous notion, 'a fluid and complex concept in which moral, religious, economic, and political attitudes were mixed into a vague and sometimes contradictory amalgam' (p. 48). Despite this, and despite the fact that Sekora's coverage of the period germane to this thesis is patchy, he nonetheless provides a useful framework within which to position the literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in which embroidery is considered a mark of vice (below, pp. 84-86).

But for the Elizabethan and Jacobean elite needlewomen, and for this thesis as a whole, needlework was an unambiguously positive and powerful sign. The counter-argument to Sekora's study of negative luxury is, ironically, contained in the title of his first Chapter, 'Necessity and Hierarchy', which identifies 'necessity' as a crucial topos in, and preservation of 'hierarchy' as a crucial motivation for, the writings on luxury he surveys. Needlework was, in the period covered by this thesis and seen especially in Chapter One, the sign of the elite woman. It encoded her place within a social hierarchy, as defined by sumptuary law. Its practice signalled her elite birth and education, and her stewardship of the household. The materials used were the most costly, available in law and in practice only to the elite. The surface of the embroidered objects blazoned virtue with complex iconographical codes meant to be interpreted by others of comparable class and education. For these women the conspicuous practice and its ownership of luxury needlework were social, political and economic necessities.

The Classical philosophical framework supporting this refocusing of luxury is gestured to by Sekora (pp. 54, 55) but not examined extensively, since his project concentrates on historical notions of luxury as unambiguously negative. The framework's Aristotelian roots are touched upon in Chapter One below (p. 86-7), but more importantly for the present study are located in relation to early modern needlework by contemporary readings of Xenophon, and by Elyot, Spenser and Sidney, amongst others (pp. 87-88, 90-91).

The notion of luxury refocused as aristocratic necessity underpins the needlework of Bess of Hardwick, considered in the Case Study to Chapter One below, and is explicitly referred to by her (pp. 93-94 below). At the same time as her prodigious building projects and sumptuous textiles proclaimed her conspicuously aristocratic in her 'necessary' consumption and fitting magnificence, Bess used her textiles too as a sign of her virtuous economy and thrift (pp. 95-95). The Case Study considers the way in which Bess used her needlework and her textile collection as a whole to blazon herself, amongst other things, a virtuous and aristocratic wife and widow, using materials and visual codes the reading of which involved luxury in a very different project to that outlined by Sekora. Mary Stuart's stipulation that the materials with which she was to embroider a skirt for Elizabeth were 'the best that can be found' (p. 17 below) was a precise rendering in embroidered terms of the sincerity of her honourable intentions with respect to her English cousin. It also sought to mark the exchange of gifts of royal quality between royal kin.

One characteristic of the aristocratic place in the social hierarchy claimed for Bess and her contemporaries by their needlework and embroidery was a superfluity of leisure. In the same way that women of Bess of Hardwick's social standing had to supply moral

justifications in answer to criticism of excessive expenditure, they also had to face moral anxieties about the idleness supposedly attendant upon their aristocratic way of life. In a sense, they were a 'leisure class'. The term is taken from Thorstein Veblen's classic work of institutional economics, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, first published in 1899.²

Veblen's study was a critique of the attitudes and practices of the American industrial moneyed class of his time. In contrast to the prevailing views of the neo-classical economists, for whom utility was the main rationale for the consumption of goods and services, Veblen applied psychological and anthropological theories to anatomize the practices developed by his industrial class to consume surplus of leisure they enjoyed by virtue of their financial surplus. The class held itself to be superior in every way to the members of society who were obliged to work for a living producing goods and services. Labour was held by Veblen's leisure class to be 'a mark of inferiority' (p. 36) and 'habits of industry and thrift' (p. 38) were construed as demeaning. Superiority had to be demonstrated, and one of Veblen's major concerns is to lay bare the uselessness of the system of refined manners, ceremony, dress, pastimes and skills that filled this need.

Veblen showed that the leisure class he studied gauged social standing by the conspicuousness of its expenditure. He coined the phrases 'conspicuous leisure' and 'conspicuous consumption' for the two key characteristics of the class's economic behaviour: 'in the one case it is a waste of time and effort, and in the other it is a waste of goods' (p. 85). 'Waste' was the essential point. Wealth was consumed with the express purpose of having no tangible utility beyond the conspicuousness of the spending, and the aim of managing leisure was 'the non-productive consumption of

² New York and London: MacMillan.

time' (p. 43).

The behaviour of Veblen's industrial leisure class is very different from the practices of the elite needlewoman considered in this thesis. The Elizabethan and Jacobean aristocrats certainly had a comparable set of codified manners to signal their superiority over the lower orders (which included the production and consumption of luxury needlework, see especially pp. 47-54, 57-62 and 96 below). There were also contemporary anxieties about the dangers of idleness and about making the consumption of leisure time a 'productive' business, anxieties which needlework helped to allay (pp. 97-99). But primarily, as the Introduction to this thesis points out, needlework was invariably referred to by practitioners and others as elite women's '*work*' (p. 20), and, as noted above, the evidence examined in Chapter One suggests that needlework was a powerful index of industry which quintessentially signalled the *productive* use of time (see, for example, pp. 49-50, 97-100 below). Leisure, as Chapter One notes, was understood not as a *lack* but as an *opportunity* for activity (p. 100).

What Veblen does contribute to the arguments of this thesis is his notion of 'conspicuousness'. It is important that these objects are 'conspicuous' to the elite who operated a politics of conspicuous display and magnificence, but in all cases they have utility. All the needlewomen examined in this thesis are actively engaged in the production or consumption of lasting objects. These objects will be seen sometimes standing as memorials, or testimonies to good character. Sometimes they play a part in the construction of social relations, sometimes they are commodified, and sometimes they have a precise role to play in a highly developed gift culture. Early modern embroidered objects conspicuously produced or consumed by the elite were a far cry from the objects consumed uselessly by the conspicuously wasteful leisured industrial

class of the late nineteenth century criticised by Veblen.

Chapter Three of the thesis considers the specific case of the elite political gift of needlework. The understanding of the operation of the Elizabethan and Jacobean needlework gift is based on Marcel Mauss's 1925 study *Essai sur le Don*, translated in 1966 as *The Gift: Form and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*.³ In this study, Mauss identified the central characteristics of gift in potlatch systems in primitive cultures such as Polynesian, Melanesian and North American Indian tribes, which, he argued, serves 'as a historical explanation of features of our own society' which have their social roots in practices similar to those he studied (p. 46).

The central characteristic of the Maussian archaic gift is the triple obligation to give, receive and to repay (pp. 37-41), which sets up circles of giving within society. Gifts are apparently made 'disinterestedly and modestly' (p. 20), but are in fact, motivated by 'competition, rivalry, show, and a desire for greatness and wealth', constituting 'cycles of prestations and counter-prestations with interest' (p. 26). The individual is bound within the system by 'rights and duties', being obligated to give, receive and repay in turn (p. 11). Mauss sees the gift as working to construct social fabric by binding its members within a complex system of obligation.

The Maussian pattern is observed in Chapter Three in the gift systems at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts, which 'positioned both the giver and receiver in a web of obligations, of acceptance and reciprocity, which bound them together, socially and politically' (p. 254 below). The requital of the gift is an essential feature: as in the Maussian gift, the interest of the needlewoman is shown to be both personal (as

individual women seek specific political outcomes from their gifts, such as acceptance at court, freedom from imprisonment, leases on property, permission to travel abroad) and social (as the Jacobean court as a whole imagines its social fabric to be constructed in a 'chain of amity', represented by gifts to and from the sovereign).

Recent studies of gifts and needlework gifts by Patricia Fumerton, Janet Arnold and Lisa M. Klein help to anchor Maussian ideas in the specific reality of the Elizabeth and Jacobean needlework gift, showing that it is socially and politically constitutive in the way in which it is a powerful means of promoting the self within the structures of political and social power (pp. 254-56; 272). For the system of early modern needlework gifts fits into a wider issue of patronage, which is not covered by Mauss's analysis but which this chapter explores at length. An understanding of the vocabulary of grace used at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts to give and receive needlework gifts (its roots in the classical topos of the dance of the Three Graces) is crucial to make visible the patronage system within which these gifts transact.

Mauss's analysis has been recently criticised by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Alan Schrift, for attributing a spiritual or mystical force – the Maori *Hau* – as the reason for the tripartite structure of the gift system. '*Hau* is not the ultimate explanation for exchange,' argues Lévi-Strauss; 'it is the conscious form whereby men of a given society [...] apprehended an unconscious necessity whose explanation lies elsewhere'.⁴ This is a useful distinction for this study, which sees the forging of political ties of loyalty and need within Jacobean patronage networks through needlework gifts given a quasi-

³ Trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1966). Subsequent references are given in the text.

⁴ Selections from Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. By Alan D. Schrift (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 45-69 (pp. 55-56). Schrift endorses Lévi-Strauss's criticism, p. 8.

spiritual raison d'être by the doctrine of Grace.

Embroidered Rhetoric: The Social, Religious and Political Functions of Elite Women's Needlework, c.1560-1630

INTRODUCTION

I begin with three early modern events: a gift, a lawsuit, and an embroidered vestment. They link three instances of surviving needlework with three identifiable women, one a queen, one a countess, and one a member of the landed gentry.

In May 1574 Mary Queen of Scots wrote to charge the French ambassador in London with the purchase of 'eight ells of crimson satin, the same colour as the enclosed silk sample, the best that can be found in London', and 'a pound each of single and double silver thread', to be sent to her 'in fifteen days'.¹ The purchases were used by her to embroider 'a piece of my own handiwork', a crimson satin skirt with matching taffeta lining, which she sent to Elizabeth I as a gift that same month via the French ambassador, 'as evidence of the honour I bear her, and the desire I have to employ myself in anything agreeable to her'.² Mary was at this time being held in captivity in England: Elizabeth I had appointed as her gaolers George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, and his wife Elizabeth, best known as 'Bess of Hardwick'. Elizabeth I's response to this gift is documented in a letter by the same ambassador to the French King:

¹ 'Huict aulnes de satin incarnat, de la coulleur de l'eschantillon de soye que je vous envoyer, le mieux choisi que pourrés trouver dans Londres, mais je le voudrois avoir dans quinze jours, et une livre de plus deslié et double fil d'argent que pourrés faire tramer, et en bref je vous rendray compte de l'ouvrage en quoy je le pense employer', Letter from Sheffield dated 20 February 1574 from Mary Stuart to de la Mothe Fénelon, in *Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Marie Stuart, Reine D'Ecosse, Publiés sur les Originaux et les Manuscrite du State Paper Office de Londres et des Principales Archives et Bibliothèques de L'Europe*, ed. by Prince Alexandre Labanoff, 7 vols (London: Dolman, 1844), IV, p. 111.

² 'Un essay de mon ouvrage [...] comme tesmoignage de l'honneur que je luy porte et désir que j'ay de m'employer en chose qui luy peut estre agréable', Letter from Sheffield dated 8 May 1574 from Mary

The Queen of Scots, your sister-in-law, is very well, and yesterday I presented on her behalf a skirt of crimson satin, worked with silver, very fine and all worked with her own hand, to the Queen of England, to whom the present was very agreeable, for she found it very nice and has prized it much; and she seemed to me that I found her much softened towards her.³

A skirt believed to be Mary's gift to Elizabeth (fig. I.1) is embroidered with a design of scrolling stems bearing, amongst other flowers, the floral emblem of Elizabeth I, the English rose. The scrolling stems form standing points at the top of the design tipped by Mary's floral emblem, the Scottish thistle.

Twelve years later in May 1586, the relationship between Mary's erstwhile gaoler the 6th Earl of Shrewsbury and Bess of Hardwick had broken down. Shrewsbury brought a suit against his estranged wife for the return of household possessions which he alleged were his property, including

rich hangings made by Thomas Lane, Ambrose, William Barlow, and Henry, Mr Henry Cavendish's man, and had copes of tissue, cloth of gold, and other things towards the making thereof, meat, drink and wages paid to the embroiderers by the Earl during the working of them; and other hangings of green velvet, birds and fowls and needlework set upon the velvet.⁴

Bess wrote to answer his claims on 4 August, roundly rebutting them and asserting in her turn

the copes bought by Sir Wm. St. Loo at Chatsworth at the time of the deed of gift. Most of the hangings made at Chatsworth, and some of the

Stuart to de la Mothe Fénelon (Labanoff, IV, pp. 159-60).

³ De la Mothe Fénelon to the French King, May 1574, reported, unattributed, in Margaret Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots*, 2nd edn (Carlton, Bedford: Bean, 1986), p. 83. Charles IX died in May 1574, and was succeeded by Henri III.

⁴ List dated 1 August 1586, HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, III, no. 320 (p. 158), given in full in no. 321 (pp. 158-61).



Fig. I.1 Mary, Queen of Scots (?): embroidered panel for a skirt (private collection)

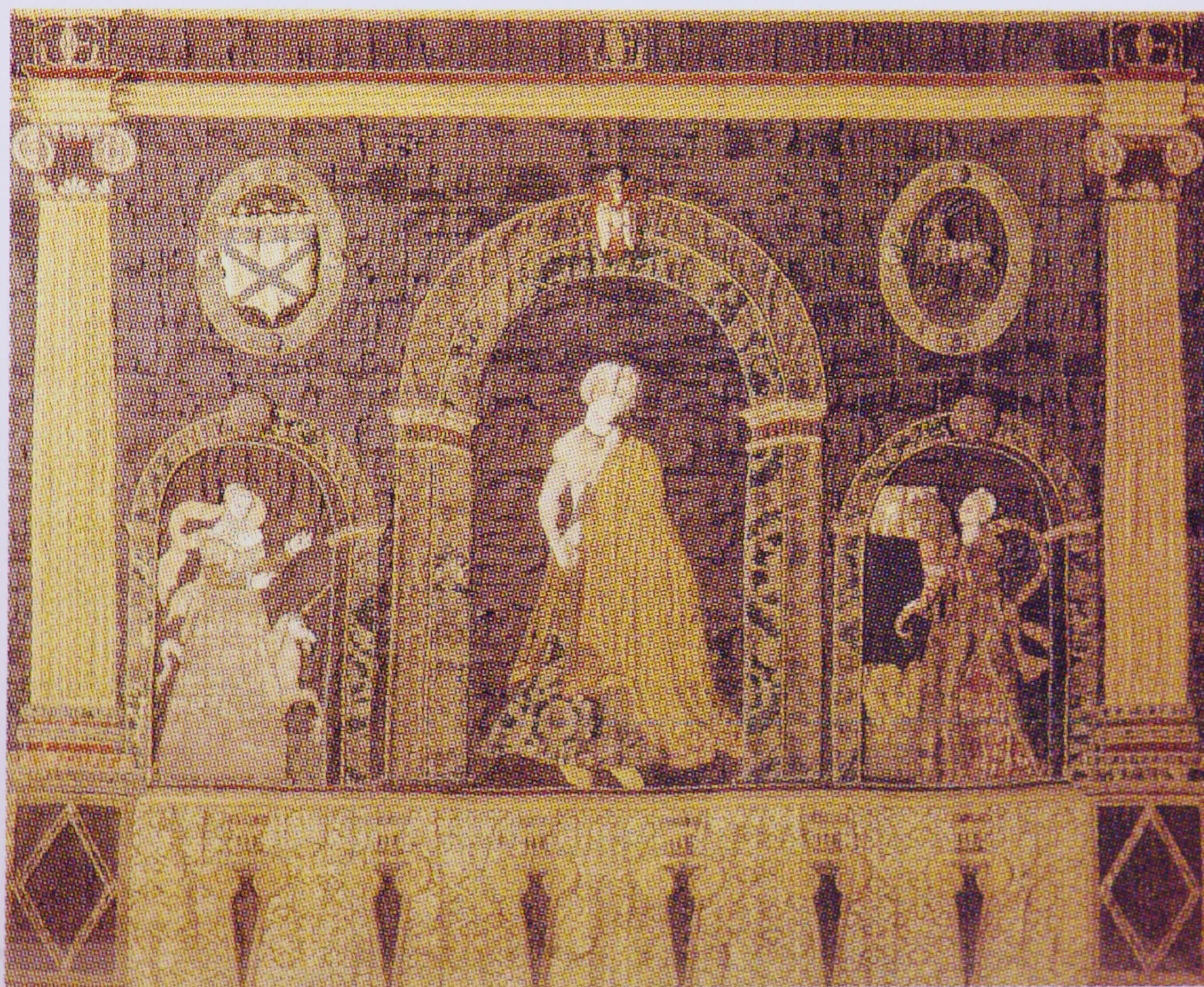


Fig. I.2 Bess of Hardwick et al.: appliqué hanging of Artemisia flanked by patience and charity (Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire)

Countess's grooms, women and some boys she kept, wrought the most part of them. Never had but one embroiderer at one time that wrought on them. His Lordship never gave the worth of 5*l.* towards the making of them.⁵

The disputed hangings are identified as a set surviving at Bess's house Hardwick Hall. Worked in appliqué using rich ecclesiastical fabrics, including 'cut velvets, patterned cloths of gold, and multicoloured silk damasks, with details embroidered with metal threads, partly over padding, and applied in silk and metal bobbin lace', the hangings depict a series of famous women of antiquity flanked by personifications of their virtues.⁶ One of the hangings, dated 1573, shows Lucretia accompanied by Chastity and Liberality (fig. I.2). Over the archways under which Chastity and Liberality stand are placed the Hardwick arms and crest. The group of three is enclosed by two classical columns supporting an entablature with a frieze decorated with the monogrammed initials 'G. E.' and 'G. E. S.' for 'George Elizabeth Shrewsbury'.

At the Jesuit school Stonyhurst College in Lancashire is a rare surviving example of a mid-seventeenth century Roman Catholic vestment (figs. I.3a and I.3b). Exquisitely embroidered with a strapwork design enclosing a riot of flowers, and scrolls bearing the Easter cry of joy '*Allelvia*', the vestment is further ornamented with the monograms of Christ and Mary, and several large precious stones. Even more unusual is the fact that the vestment is one of several surviving sets of vestments that can be attributed to a

⁵ HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, III, no. 321, p. 161. The enquiry, judged by Francis Walsingham and William Burghley, found in Bess's favour but permitted Shrewsbury to bring a suit against William Cavendish, his wife's son by her second husband. Shrewsbury alleged that Cavendish had 'come to Chatsworth by night' to 'convey away the principal stuff, and that on two occasions' (letter dated 20 August 1584 from the Earl of Shrewsbury to the Earl of Leicester, HMC, *Bath (Longleat)*, v (Talbot Papers), p. 52).

⁶ Santina Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance: The Hardwick Textiles* (London: National Trust, 1998), p. 4. The fabrics used to make them were, Bess claimed, bought by her third husband William St Loe (HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, III, pp. 158-61), and were, according to Wells-Cole, Italian silks of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and*



Fig. I.3a Helena Wintour: Alleluia chasuble, front (Stonyhurst College)



Fig. I.3b Alleluia chasuble, back view

single individual. This needlewoman was a Jesuit-directed Recusant Catholic: Helena Wintour, daughter of Gunpowder plotter Robert Wintour and a distant cousin of Bess of Hardwick's fourth husband Shrewsbury. She included as an integral part of the design two embroidered golden rings, one enclosing Wintour's crest, an eagle alighting on a white tower, and bearing the words '*Orate pro me* Helena Wintovr' ('Pray for me, Helena Wintour') (fig. I.4), and the other bearing the embroidered date 1655, her family motto '*Omnia Desuper*' ('Everything from above') and enclosing Wintour's arms in a lozenge, the proper heraldic escutcheon for a single woman (fig. I.5). The vestments were bequeathed on her death in 1671 to her Jesuit confessors.

At the heart of these three events, the gift, the lawsuit and the vestment, are three instances of what early modern elite women called their 'work'. All three women cited above dedicated a good deal of their time to this kind of working: Mary Stuart told one visitor in 1569 that 'all day she wrought with the needle'. Shrewsbury reported early on in Mary's captivity that Bess of Hardwick and the Queen of Scots were occupied together every day 'working with the needle' and 'devising works'. And Jesuit Father Grey, writing of a visit to Helena Wintour in 1668, told his Provincial that 'she hath bene these many yeares, and is yet, piously employed in making rich embrodered Churchstuffle [...]. A parcell of curious worke I saw actually *in fieri* upon the frame'.⁷ My three needlework instances were highly valued by their makers and within their social contexts, for doing various political, social, economic or religious work. So why has needlework not been accorded greater critical importance to date?

Jacobean England: The Influence of Continental Prints, 1558-1625 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 257).

⁷ Nicholas White to William Cecil, 26 February 1569, HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, I, p. 400; Shrewsbury to William Cecil, 13 March 1569, *CSP, Scots*, II, p. 632; Father George Grey to the Provincial, 17 November 1668, cited in H[enry]. C[hadwick]., 'Helena Wintour and her Vestments', *Stonyhurst Magazine*, 29 (1948), 244-50 (p. 246).

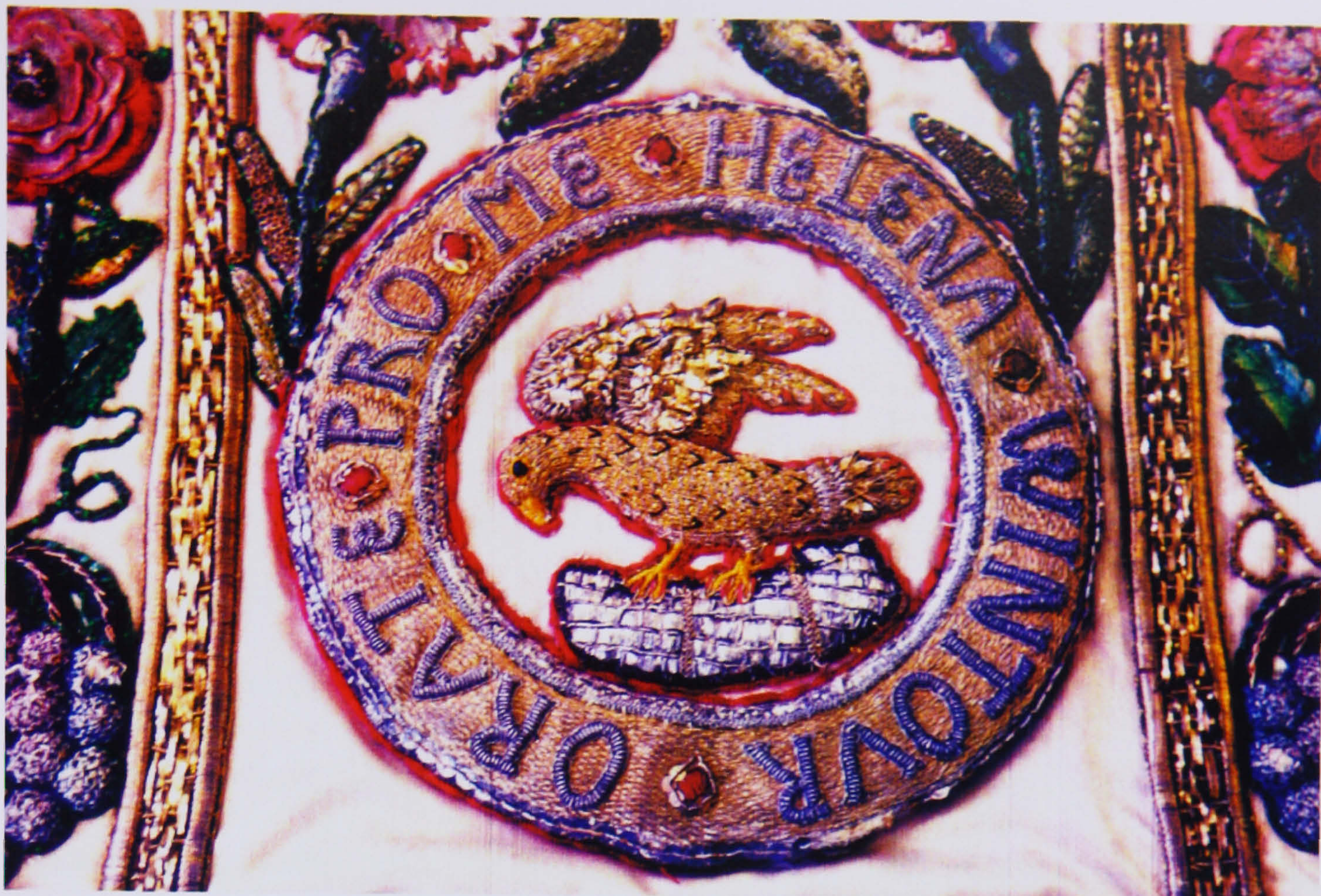


Fig. I.4 Detail of Alleluia chasuble showing gold ring enclosing Wintour family heraldry and embroidered '*Orate pro me Helena Wintovr*'

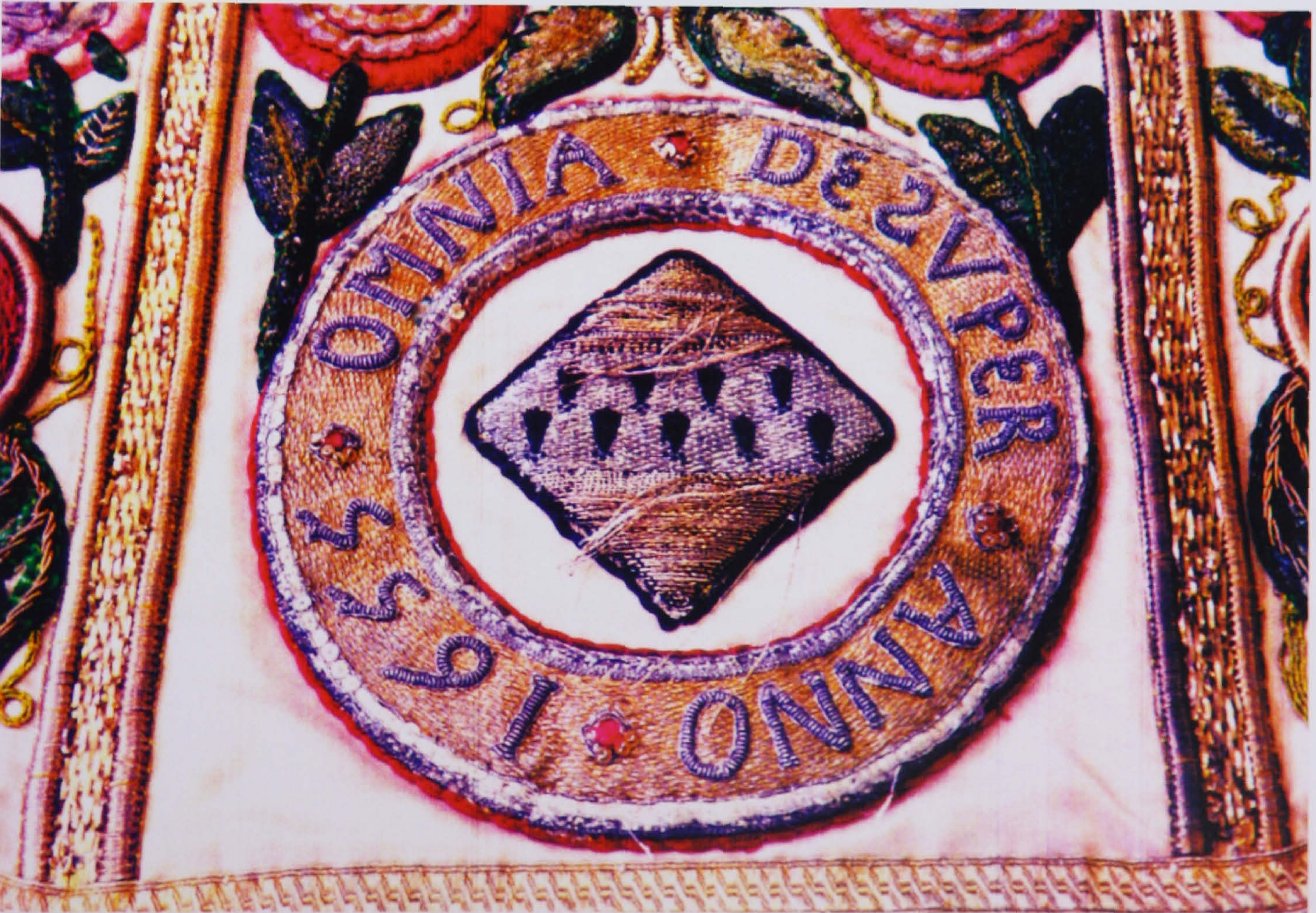


Fig. I.5 Detail of Alleluia chasuble showing gold ring enclosing family heraldry and embroidered '*Omnia Desvper 1655*'

For a long time it was a commonplace in academic circles that early modern women were deprived of a public voice: 'chaste, silent and obedient' became an almost clichéd phrase. The androcentric system of value that prioritised canonical literary texts as 'high art' over other forms of cultural production taught that women didn't speak, had no voice, were culturally silenced. Recent projects, Ashgate's facsimile Early Modern Englishwoman series, for example, or Nottingham Trent University's Perdita project, seek to recover early modern women's literary culture for a contemporary readership. But even the writers who do seek to reposition our understanding of women's works all too often ignore the very 'work' that the women speak of themselves as doing: one analysis of the early modern trope of Penelope discusses the various forms of Penelope's discourse, including 'narration, conversation, a letter, a poem, a song, and oration', without (ironically enough) looking at the possible discursive significance of the needlework object itself.⁸ Another study which explores what it sees as the 'enactment' of female opposition to Jacobean patriarchy within Queen Anna's court masques discusses the subversive significance in *Tethys Festival* of gifts by the Queen in the person of Tethys, Queen of the Sea, namely 'a trident to the King and the rich sword of Astraea to Henry'. It passes over without mention the significance of the third gift, the embroidered scarf that is knotted around Astraea's sword.⁹ It is as if the needlework has been rendered valueless by our criteria of judgement, and as such has

⁸ Georgianna Zeigler, 'Penelope and the Politics of Woman's Place', in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 25-46, (p. 28). The importance to Bess of Hardwick of the persona of Penelope is discussed below in the Case Study to Chapter One.

⁹ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), Chapter 1: 'Enacting Opposition: Queen Anne and the Subversions of Masquing', pp. 15-43 (p. 39). The significance of Tethys's embroidered scarf is discussed below in Chapter Three.

become invisible to scholarly enquiry.¹⁰

Calls over the last fifteen years to implement other value systems have enabled us to write very different histories. ‘The whole point,’ argued Jean Howard in 1986, is to identify discourses ‘which made it possible to see the “facts” in a particular way – indeed, made it possible to see certain phenomena *as* facts at all’.¹¹ Speaking as a literary historian, Howard called for a reassessment of the social contexts we use to approach texts. The same holds true for other kinds of non-literary cultural artefacts: Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn’s editorial project in *Renaissance Bodies* (1990) was to pull together research which engaged in ‘the recovery of contexts which will allow us to begin to read images hitherto neglected. A title-page formerly deemed to be poverty-stricken in its meaning and to employ crude images begins to acquire the density we associate with a literary or artistic text.’¹²

The needlework cited above is surely functioning precisely as text. In different ways, each of these three women claims authorship of their needlework. Mary signs her work with a metonym, identifying herself as the head of the country of which the thistle is an emblem. Bess of Hardwick and Helena Wintour both sign and date their work and emphasise their personal and family identities through heraldic blazons.

¹⁰ Jane Stevenson, in a conference paper on the implications of the immense outlay represented by textile consumption in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, argues that ‘it is worth asking whether, if this had been a conference on the King’s court, or on royal power in the sixteenth century, a paper on textiles would have been considered appropriate’ (‘Texts and textiles: self-presentation and self-representation’ delivered to the conference on ‘The Queen’s Court: Elite Female Cultural Production and the Cultures of the Early Stuart Courts (1603-42), 18-19 April, 1998 (p. 20)). I am grateful to Jane Stevenson for permission to quote from this work-in-progress.

¹¹ Jean E. Howard, reassessing a quarter century of New Historicism, in ‘The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies’, *ELR*, 16 (1986), 13-43 (p. 27).

¹² *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c.1540-1660*, ed. by Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), p. 7.

If this needlework is discursive, what is it that is being said, to what readership? In insisting on authorial legitimacy, each woman posits a public, a readership that is invited to interpret her embroidered text. Mary's gift is designed to be read on the international stage, to be a topic of conversation at the courts of England and France. The fact of Mary's personal authorship is understood to be highly significant. Mary herself emphasises the discursive nature of the personally handmade nature of the gift. It is, she says, 'evidence'. Evidence of Mary's diplomatic stance with respect to Elizabeth, of 'the honour I bear her', of 'the desire I have to employ myself in anything agreeable to her'. International observers are primed to interpret the terms of this discourse, and their interest in Mary's gift centres on the nature of embroidered authorship-as-evidence, and Elizabeth's response to it. Her becoming 'much softened' towards Mary is understood as being in some way linked to Mary's working the embroidery gift herself. Mary Stuart's readership interprets her gift in two ways. Firstly, it is interested in the 'work' itself, the fabric ('the best that can be found') and the embroidery ('worked with silver, very fine'). Both giver and receiver are represented with embroidered floral symbols, the thistle and the rose. Secondly, scrutinising the embroidered surface for meaning, the readership finds in it an emblem of the presentation of the gift itself: the harmonious entwining stems represent the desired outcome of the prestation, a 'softening' of Elizabeth's attitude towards Mary.

Floral iconography is also a feature of Helena Wintour's embroidery. The riot of flowers on the Eastertide vestment signifies according to a Catholic vocabulary of floral symbols of Christ, the Virgin, and the liturgical year. But in contrast to the arena in which the passage of Mary Stuart's very public, political gift was witnessed, Wintour's vestments are intended for the eyes of a hidden community of Catholic recusants only.

This community is, like Elizabeth I, invited to respond to the author's work. The use of

the vestments, and indeed their bequest, harnesses Wintour's authorship in the service of the Church, and Wintour's embroidery asks that such benefaction is requited with intercession: '*Orate pro me*, Helena Wintovr'.

Bess of Hardwick's authorship is of a different order. Although other records show that Bess did embroider personally, the hangings in question were not the work of her own hands. We are told that her 'grooms, women and some boys she kept, wrought the most part', and that an unknown number of professional embroiderers also worked on them.¹³ Authorship is, nonetheless, appropriated. Where Mary Stuart's embroidered skirt and Helena Wintour's vestment state 'This is mine, I made it', Bess's hangings state 'These are mine, I caused them to be made'. Bess's hangings were produced in-house under the direction of a professional, but Bess's answer to Shrewsbury's claims makes clear that she had overall supervision of the project: she is aware precisely who worked on it, who paid the workers' board and wages, where the materials came from, and the extent of Shrewsbury's contribution. In commissioning and supervising the making of the hangings, the overall design (and possibly the fine detail) is under Bess's control. And the hangings blazon forth an identity that is primarily hers: the arms and crests are those of Hardwick, not Shrewsbury, relegating Shrewsbury's appearance in monogram to a function of Bess's identity, rather than the other way around. The hangings were a part of an overall scheme which included needlework and textiles of varying hands, Bess's, those of her servants, and those of professional embroiderers working in-house on a temporary basis. Other needlework was commissioned externally, and some items, such as a set of tapestries illustrating the story of Gideon purchased from Sir Christopher

¹³ It is known that quilters in the eighteenth century and beyond employed boys to stand behind the frames upon which the quilts were stretched and push the needle back through the fabric. One may imagine this might have been the kind of work done by Bess's 'boys'. I am grateful to Pam Rawson-Mackenzie for this information.

Hatton, were bought in from other sources. Bess's authorial function is here that of a compiler, a collector. But she considers herself the maker inasmuch as she assembles the overall picture for display in a prodigy house intended to showcase Bess and her family to their social context, their elite visitors and guests. Such an educated readership is expected to be conversant with classical allusion, and make a semiotic connection between Bess's blazons of Hardwick heraldry and the virtues claimed by the classical *exempla* below them. 'Women's work' is understood in this thesis to mean the [needle]work that is done by elite women and also the work of direction and co-ordination, that part of the ordering of the household that concerns itself with textiles.

Three different authors, three different texts, three different readerships. But embroidered forms of authored discourse do not make for easy reading. They beg many questions. How could an embroidered skirt mediate the tense relationship between two queens, and 'much soften' the attitude of one to the other? How, and in what wider set of political practices, is the embroidered gift understood as a metonym for the honour Mary bears Elizabeth, and her desire to serve her English cousin? And what importance did the appliqué hangings have for Shrewsbury and Bess that they were worth fighting a lawsuit over? Certainly the face value of the textiles would have been an issue, but may more be learned from the body of the text? May the specific significance to Bess of Virtue personified be read out when understood in the context of the vast collection of textiles put together in Bess's great country houses? And what of Wintour's iconography? If Wintour's intentions in making the vestments are in some way contained in the sum of her embroidery, her contemporaries produced conflicting readings of that text. Ownership that was so clear-cut to the Jesuits in their records of the bequest was in fact contested by Wintour's heirs, who read Wintour family iconography as proof of testamentary intention. And after ownership is determined,

what survives for reading after three and a half centuries? What of Helena Wintour's original project may be recovered? This thesis sets out to recover the broader context in which such needlework may be understood, and to effect a re-reading of these densely significant material texts.

My interest in 'discursive needlework' began in 1996 with an MA thesis on the extant needlework panels of Mary Queen of Scots.¹⁴ The thesis asserted that the substance of this needlework was essentially emblematic, a mode which literary studies recognise as being discursive and communicative. The emblems, jointly and severally, were considered in the context of their making, Mary's nineteen years' imprisonment in England. I argued that, at a time when Mary's other forms of textuality were monitored, severely censored, or forbidden, needlework became a powerful vehicle for Mary to argue against the reasons for her imprisonment. Mary used her needlework to assert the legitimacy of her monarchy in the face of her enforced abdication, and her virtuous character in answer to her detractors. And ultimately, when it became clear that execution was inevitable, Mary used her needlework to fashion an idea of herself as a Catholic martyr.

At the time I wrote there was very little in the way of this kind of scholarly attention to Elizabethan and Jacobean needlework. In the 1960s and 70s textile historians such as John Nevinson, Therle Hughes, George Wingfield Digby and Margaret Swain had produced erudite and useful catalogues and surveys of sixteenth and seventeenth century domestic needlework, but they regarded such needlework as primarily decorative. Their

¹⁴ 'Embroidering a Royal Identity: The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots', unpublished masters thesis, University of Warwick, 1996.

chief interest lay in rigorous study of techniques, fabrics and stitches. They gave little attention to the significance for the embroiderers of their stitched iconography, to the discourses, in other words, of their texts.

Cross-disciplinary scholarship in the 1980s had begun to make needlework visible to a wider academic field. Rozsika Parker's 1986 ground-breaking study *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* considered the place of needlework in the socialisation of the female since medieval times, and devoted a chapter each to sixteenth and seventeenth century needlework.¹⁵ She carefully charted the development of a domestic art with 'elevated class associations' that reached its apogee in the practices of the cultured female Elizabethan and Jacobean gentry and aristocracy. Further changes came about in the later Stuart period and beyond, Parker argued, when needlework was assigned to all classes of women and was increasingly employed as a restrictive tool of suppression, deeply implicated in the 'inculcation of femininity'.¹⁶ Textile historians such as Janet Arnold and Santina Levey subsequently published illuminating work on what might be termed the cultural embeddedness of needlework, with their studies of the wardrobe of Queen Elizabeth (1988) and the Hardwick Hall textiles (1998) respectively.¹⁷ Their work and mine is indebted to art historians like Sir Roy Strong who explored the status of early modern portraits as political and social texts, and emblematisers such as Peter Daly and Michael Bath who noted that emblems were primarily of interest to sixteenth-century practitioners insofar as they were useful, functional and purposeful, their *application*, rather than the theory behind them, the basis for contemporary analysis. This realignment required radical revision of the

¹⁵ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Rozsika Parker, pp. 73, 82.

¹⁷ Janet Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* (Leeds: Maney, 1988).

traditional models and their assumptions of literary primacy. The term 'applied emblematics', wrote Bath, 'does not necessarily imply the priority of the literary models. An applied art is not necessarily secondary, nor of minor importance.'¹⁸ More recently, art historians have contributed much important work on the sources of embroidered images, in particular Anthony Wells-Cole's *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Influence of Continental Prints, 1558-1625*.

The disciplines of English Literature and Women's Studies have produced four studies that focus on the domestic embroidery of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass's chapter 'The Needle and the Pen: Needlework and the Appropriation of Printed Texts' is the most recent.¹⁹ Jones and Stallybrass's work covers much of the same ground as Parker's survey, but lacks both her critical sense of social change over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and her attention to class differentiation. As a result, their study sets up structural problems of the kind which the present thesis has sought to negotiate and which the other three studies, focussing on the needlework practices of individual women, avoid. Jones and Stallybrass's time-span is an undifferentiated 'early modern England', and assumptions of society-wide practice and experience are made from a limited range of particular examples. In addition, while they announce that their chapter explores 'the habit of needlework assigned to high-ranking women as a form of virtuous femininity' with the

¹⁸ Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), p. 8. Strong's influential studies of Elizabethan portraiture, *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Pantheon, 1969), and *The Cult of Elizabeth* ([London]: Thames and Hudson, 1977). The many subsequent studies which have built on his work include the studies edited by Gent and Llewellyn in *Renaissance Bodies*; Margaret Aston, *The King's Bedpost: Reformation and Iconography in a Tudor Group Portrait* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and David Howarth, *Images of Rule: Art and Politics in the English Renaissance, 1485-1649* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁹ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 134-171. Subsequent references are given in the text.

intention of ‘looking closely at needlework done by early modern Englishwomen’ (p. 134), much of their material is purely literary. Where needlework is discussed, it has often originated from much lower down the social scale and was produced almost entirely after the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Most of the pattern-book literature that they survey at the beginning of their chapter was not reflected in the embroidery of the Elizabethan period (as needlework historian George Wingfield-Digby notes, ‘it is not until the seventeenth century that embroidery [...] approximated at all closely to the Pattern Books’²⁰), and not intended for ‘high-ranking women’ at all. Rather, the target reader was the ‘upwardly mobile consumer’ from the class of ‘middle ranking women’ who desired ‘to rise in the social hierarchy’ by *emulating* the occupations of elite women (pp. 138, 137).²¹

An interesting and useful survey of literature which promoted the idea of ‘the needle as a pen’ (primarily seventeenth century and male-authored) is followed by discussion of needlework artefacts which mostly considers the embroidered ‘stump work’ panels typical of the second quarter of the seventeenth century onwards, discussion which asserts the ‘aristocratic status of many mid-seventeenth century needleworkers’ (p. 165). But the overwhelming number of surviving stump work panels is the work of nameless pre-adolescent girls of middle class families who could newly afford to embroider (an example is shown in fig. 2.4). Stump work panels, as Rozsika Parker had made clear, were the rough equivalent of our contemporary ‘tapestry kits’ in the sense that pre-drawn designs on fabric were produced in large numbers by London print-sellers.²² The skill and ingenuity of stump work lay in the range of stitches employed, and the

²⁰ *Elizabethan Embroidery* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 52.

²¹ See Rozsika Parker, p. 86.

²² For the sale of printed fabric designs, see John L. Nevins and Margaret Swain, ‘John Nelham, Embroiderer’, *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, 65 (1982), 1-13; and John L. Nevins, ‘Peter

painstaking application of media other than silk thread, such as wire, spangles, seed pearls, mica and lacework.²³ Where the girls did stitch their names into their samplers, panels or embroidered caskets, these names have come adrift from context: who, for example, was 12-year-old Hannah Smith (p. 159)? How significant is it that Mary Hulton ‘made a place for herself in history’ (p. 156) with her embroidered pillow cover of 1603, when we do not have any more information about her?²⁴ The one stump work embroiderer about whom Jones and Stallybrass have collected biographical information is Damaris Pearse, embroidering in the 1670s. She hardly supports their claim for needlewomen’s ‘aristocratic status’: she is ‘the daughter of a Nonconformist minister of Dover’, who could read and write, although she had had little in the way of formal education, and who ‘probably’ made ‘women’s undergarments that she handworked for sale’ (p. 167). The only high-ranking women mentioned are Mary Stuart (who is given three very generalised paragraphs), Bess of Hardwick (one paragraph, shared with Mary Stuart) and Dorothy Selby. Grace Mildmay, Elizabeth Cary, Viscountess Falkland, and Anne Clifford are mentioned in passing.²⁵

In short, Jones and Stallybrass leave unstudied the class of women that they set out to

Stent and John Nevinson, Publishers of Embroidery Designs’, *Apollo*, 14 (1936), 279-83.

²³ See Rozsika Parker, p. 93. Stump work embroiderers ‘laboured at a range of demanding techniques through an ordained series of embroidery projects’ (p. 84), resulting in such ‘virtuoso technical performances’ as the women’s clothes in an embroidered picture of the story of David and Bathsheba: ‘the outer garments are slightly raised and detached, embroidered with flowers and edged with needlepoint lace. The underskirts are stitched in silver-gilt thread. The towel clasped about Bathsheba is carefully edged with chenille and the folds conveyed not only by shaded colour but by padding and directional stitches’ (p. 93). This stump work picture is illustrated in fig. 2.4.

²⁴ Jones and others are concerned that we might be ‘reflecting rather than analyzing the bourgeois fixation on individualism if we privilege signed works over the productions of nameless or faceless women in early modern England’ (summary of a workshop on ‘Contested Domestic Spaces and the fashioning of a Renaissance Woman’, in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. by Betty S. Travitsky and Adele F. Seeff (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994), pp. 200-03 (p. 202)). My assertion here is not that signed works are more significant than anonymous ones, but that the detail of the works, and the significance for the stitchers, cannot be gauged and read out without knowledge of the stitcher. This is especially true for works that are emblematic in nature.

²⁵ For Dorothy Selby see below, pp. 64-68. For Grace Mildmay, see below pp. 47-49, 107. Anne

investigate. The focus of the present study is precisely these women of the Elizabethan and Jacobean elite, the aristocrats and gentry whose wealth and education had furnished them both with their own libraries of sixteenth-century herbals, natural histories and collections of Continental prints from which to 'devise' their own works, and with servants to draw out works for them. My contention in this thesis is that the individual women studied here (as Jones and Stallybrass also argue) used their pattern sources to create a public identity for themselves. This was not necessarily a subversive position, however. By reading Elizabethan and Jacobean elite needlework in the light of the educational strictures which were to bind young girls to the production of later seventeenth-century stump work, Jones and Stallybrass ascribe to Mary Stuart a spurious oppositional feminist stance: she 'refused to separate her fine stitchery from her political appearances' (p. 154). The instance of her gift to Elizabeth cited above shows, rather, that her peers *assumed* her needlework to have political valency. Similarly, Jones and Stallybrass conclude that 'Renaissance women whose needlework has been preserved, then, refused to be enclosed in a realm of anonymous private handiwork' (p. 170). I would suggest that, although this may be true of some later seventeenth century embroiderers, the Elizabethan and Jacobean elite could never have envisaged needlework as purely private, or anonymous. Bess of Hardwick's hangings, produced in a society which had yet to invent the concept of privacy as we understand it today, were designed to present a very public, and very precisely authored, show of calculated magnificence.²⁶ Needlework gave Elizabethan and Jacobean elite women an

Clifford is discussed extensively in Chapters Two and Three of this study.

²⁶ Jones and Stallybrass's desire to see needlework as a universally subversive activity leads them to read 'resistance to repressive contemporary lessons in femininity' in embroidered depictions in seventeenth century needlework panels of biblical prototypes of violent, or 'independent' women such as Judith and the Queen of Sheba (p. 153). But whilst it is likely that some of these did, indeed, express resistance to patriarchal authority, Jones and Stallybrass fail to come to grips with the cogently-argued conclusions of Parker, that, although 'it is tempting to attribute the embroiderer's choice of subjects to a feminist consciousness — an assertion of women as active beings in the very medium intended to

accepted public voice.

There is a need to reassess the network of social signifying systems in which Elizabethan and Jacobean elite domestic needlework was produced and in which it could signify and function as discursive. Tenable conclusions can be made about the works of individual elite women where their names can be attached to their work and particularly where works can be dated. Tenable conclusions can be reached about their practices where we have documentary records of the circumstances in which they worked, or their attitudes towards embroidery, whether they did it themselves, supervised it in-house, or commissioned it from professionals. Such a survey, more extensive but at the same time more closely focused than that undertaken by Jones and Stallybrass, will provide answers to the questions raised by my original instances, and may then yield conclusions about the wider practice of elite domestic needlework in the period as a whole.

Both kinds of approach had been separately taken in two very successful short studies by Jennifer Summit and Lisa M. Klein. Jennifer Summit's chapter "'A Ladies Penne': Elizabeth I and the Making of English Poetry" examined the nation's sense of Elizabeth I as a literary authority, and the implications for feminist and historicist research of George Puttenham's claim in 1589 that "'the art of English Poetry" finds its ultimate model in what he calls, in reference to Elizabeth, "the arte of a ladies penne"'.²⁷ The

teach obedience and passivity', for anonymous or unknown seventeenth century embroiderers we have 'no records of their attitudes towards their subject matter. We cannot claim them as protofeminists who stitched their heroines in conscious opposition to their ordained role, in rebellion against the activity, immobility and obedience enforced by embroidery itself. But their work was undoubtedly a declaration in favour of their sex' (Rozsika Parker, p. 102).

²⁷ Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 163-202 (p. 172). An earlier version of this chapter was published as "'The Arte of a Ladies Penne": Elizabeth I and the Poetics of Queenship', *ELR*, 26 (1996), 395-42). Summit is citing George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* [...] 1589, ed. by

revisions such a claim necessitates of feminist and historicist notions of early modern female textuality extend, for Summit, to examining another form of female textual discourse: needlework. In considering the importance of poetry to Elizabeth's statecraft (and in particular with respect to the problem Mary Stuart's presence in England constituted for Elizabeth), Summit compared a close reading of Elizabeth's poem 'The Doubt of Future Foes' with Mary's response in the form of poetry and a needleworked emblem. 'Both queens adapted poetic topoi', she argued, to 'construct a language of female rulership' (p. 194), and to gain the rhetorical upper hand. Summit's reading of Mary's embroidered emblem as a 'conspicuously covert code that demands to be deciphered' (p. 201) concurs with my reading of the whole corpus of Mary's needlework in captivity in 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', also in 1996. Summit's methodology of close critical readings of needlework alongside literary and other visual texts is one I share, and in the final case-study of this thesis I apply this methodology to argue that the textual expression in needlework of Mary and Elizabeth's relationship on Mary's part has its origins much further back in their shared history.

Lisa M. Klein achieved a reading with a wider cultural focus in her 1997 paper 'Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework'.²⁸ She located the presentation of needlework gifts within a wider understanding of the socially constitutive practice of reciprocal gifting at the Elizabethan court and the part played by gifting in the patronage system. Within this system needlework gifts are understood to 'ingratiate in order to empower' (p. 461). Of particular significance, argued Klein, is the personally hand-made gift. Klein's study provides a theoretical springboard for my inquiry in the final

Edward Arber, *English Reprints*, 15 (London: Murray, 1869), p. 255. Subsequent references to Summit's chapter are given in the text.

²⁸ Lisa M. Klein, 'Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework', *RenQ*, 50 (1997), 459-493. Subsequent references are given in the text.

chapter of this thesis into the way in which a number of aristocratic women used the needlework gift as a mediating vehicle within the structures of patronage at the courts first of Elizabeth and subsequently of James, to have their political needs met.

A study from a slightly different perspective was undertaken by Susan Frye in 1999, in 'Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot and Seventeenth-Century Anonymous Needleworkers'.²⁹ Frye here considers the handiwork of her chosen subjects from the point of view of the connections that the activity wrought between women, including connections of kin and family (Elizabeth I, Mary Stuart and Bess of Hardwick), and of co-operation in design (Mary and Bess). The focus of the chapter, women's alliances through textile work, allows Frye to link three connected women of the sixteenth-century upper aristocracy and royalty with anonymous seventeenth-century embroiderers of Biblical needlework pictures. This strategy functions well within the context of the edited volume of papers, but is of limited interest to the focus of the present thesis.³⁰

The territory of this thesis is defined by the material that is available to study. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, needlework (in its sixteenth and seventeenth century sense of canvas-work of the sort we now call 'tapestry' or 'needlepoint', where silks and wools in tent and other stitches are used to cover a fabric ground) and embroidery (the application of rich materials or silk and metal threads to rich grounds such as satin and velvet) filled the great houses of England. As Rozsika Parker says, 'every conceivable surface became a site for embroidery: sheets, valances, coverlets, table carpets,

²⁹ In *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 163-82.

³⁰ Susan Frye is currently working on book-length study of the relationship between text and textile, *Women's Work and Women's Writing*, due for publication later this year.

cupboard carpets, cushions for benches and chairs, coifs, stomachers, sleeves, handkerchiefs, bags, hawking gear, needlecases, book covers, book marks, book cushions, shoes, gloves and aprons.’³¹ If Bess of Hardwick’s treasure house is an indicator of wider practice, then a primary function of these female-authored embroidered surfaces was discursive. Many different registers of needleworked discourse will be encountered in the course of this study: apologies and defences of women, philosophical debates, riddles, political diplomacy, statements of self-assertion and social connection. But the fragile nature of fabric objects means that much has disintegrated over the centuries, and much surviving needlework has been severed from its context over the course of time. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, specialist collections in museums such as the Burrell and Lady Lever Galleries in Glasgow and Port Sunlight, even the great Elizabethan and Jacobean houses, all contain much embroidery and needlework that was clearly designed for display and intended to signify. But in the absence of ascription to the authorship or ownership of an individual, interpretation of the needlework is, in many cases, a matter of conjecture.

Where needlework-as-object is lost to us or is unreadable, other information survives on needlework-as-practice. From elite women who kept diaries or wrote autobiographies information may be gleaned about their working practices. Needlework is also mentioned in the correspondence of these women and of third parties, and is itemised in inventories and wills. Information of a different order is also suggested about documentary lives by fiction: needlework is so visible in this society that men too are conversant with embroidery and trope the embroidering woman in their literature. The

³¹ Rozsika Parker, p. 69.

fictional even intrudes, for example, upon the needlework practices of one woman who records in her diary that Sidney's *Arcadia* was read aloud to her as she worked.³²

In this thesis I read needlework with and against other forms of elite cultural production domestically produced and commissioned, the body of literature, art and masquing performances which we are accustomed by now to reading as social, political and above all discursive practices. Other domestic decorative arts such as tapestry and plasterwork, although not of strictly domestic origin, help build up a picture of collated 'authorship', of individual and family iconographical programs of expression. The sumptuously embroidered clothes which are such a feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean portraiture are clearly a parallel strategy in the politics of display in which, for elite women, domestic embroidery played a major part.

Many recent studies of the literary and visual arts – including needlework – make mention of their importance to the construction of 'identity' or understanding of the early modern aristocratic 'self'. Frye understands needlework as a territory in which women could 'represent and display their identities in both imagined and politicised relations'.³³ Needlework gifts are, for Lisa Klein, 'essays in self-promotion' (p. 484). Patricia Fumerton views 'the Renaissance aristocratic self' in the entirety of its aesthetic and ornamental production from its ironwork andirons to its masquing costumes, from its banqueting voids to its embroidered cushions: 'if the identity, the "self" of the aristocracy is to be located, it must be glimpsed here in this fantastic universe of discontinuous trivia'.³⁴ The three needlework instances with which I began this chapter

³² See below, p. 101.

³³ Frye, 'Sewing Connections', p. 180.

³⁴ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 171, 172.

are clearly bound up with 'self' and 'identity', both in the sense that they are objects claimed by authorial 'selves', and in the sense that they represent their makers in some way. But the language that we use to speak of such tangled notions is highly charged. The notions of 'self' or 'subjectivity' that scholars work with often lack clear definition and are frequently organised around a twentieth century sense of interiority.

As Bruce Smith pointed out in 2000,

early modern English provided no 'ego', no 'psyche', no 'personality', not even 'individual' in the sense of an inward perception about who one is. The word 'self' still carried its originary force as a way of saying 'that very one'.³⁵

In a chapter which is concerned to unravel the early modern meanings of the word 'person' in order to understand Shakespearean notions of masculinity, Smith unintentionally provides me with a theoretical framework in which to read this crucial aspect of early modern femininity. Smith distinguishes between four separate early modern meanings of the word 'person' arising in Shakespeare's playtexts, meanings that illustrate very succinctly how needlework is implicated in a needlewoman's projection of 'identity' or 'self' to society. 'Person' is understood in one sense (*OED*, C.1) as the *physical body* which Smith identifies Shakespeare calling the 'self': a 'place-marker' (p. 7). The *person-as-agent*, 'the human being acting in some capacity' (*OED*, II.2.a), 'functions as a social role, something that can be put on and taken off along with a costume' (p. 24). The *person-as-personage* (*OED*, II.2.b) is a 'social role' of 'distinction or importance' (p. 27), what for monarchs is the 'royal image' (p. 28). Personage is essentially 'a matter of external signifiers'. And lastly, Smith's understanding of *person-as-actor* is of one who creates a 'theatrical effect, an illusion

³⁵ Bruce Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7. Subsequent

produced by *personae*' (p. 35), the Latin word for the mask with which stage actors assume character. The needleworking woman is person-as-body, in this sense. But it is the other three understandings of the early modern notion of 'person' which are of most interest to me here: the notion of person-as-agent, the social role which may be assumed and taken off again, and of the socially important 'person-as-personage', and 'person-as-actor' operating through *personae*.

Personage is, as Bruce Smith reminds us, primarily constructed through the deployment of external signifiers of status, wealth and power. I want to argue for needlework what Peter Daly argues for portraiture, that the embroiderer, like the sitter, was 'concerned to project [her] conception of [her]self and [her] role in society, [...] to translate into visual and external terms notions of self and [...] social and political status'.³⁶ I want to argue, in other words, that personage was projected by the production and consumption of luxury needleworked artefacts. When a needlewoman worked, she projected personage in two ways, firstly in the material creation of the objects of conspicuous consumption the possession of which marked her as elite, and secondly in the creation of her specific personage on the surface of the needleworked artefact, represented symbolically. Thus Mary Stuart embroidered 'the idea of herself' as the personage of distinction and importance with the representation of a 'royal image' in thistles of silver silk. Personage accrued to Bess of Hardwick in the creation and possession of hangings fabricated from conspicuously luxurious textiles, and both she and Helena Wintour projected personage in their status-marking family heraldry.

references are given in the text.

³⁶ Peter Daly, 'England and the Emblem: The Cultural Context of English Emblem Books', in *The English Emblem and the Continental Tradition*, ed. by P. M. Daly (New York: AMS, 1988), pp. 1-60 (p. 6). Daly echoes the 'fundamental principle governing all Tudor and Jacobean portraiture' framed by Roy Strong in *The English Icon*. It is, says Strong, 'concerned with recording and defining in visual terms the position of a sitter in society' (*The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture*

Persona in needlework is primarily constructed on the embroidered surface by iconography and symbolism: Bess is also a person-as-actor when she assumes the persona of virtue personified, and Wintour uses her embroidered floral iconography to assert the quintessentially virtuous persona for the Virgin Mary, as I will show in my discussion of her vestments. Persona is created, in needlework as in the other visual arts and in literature, within an early modern matrix of symbols, emblems, universal truths, arguments and topoi, all linked to a parallel and universal system of images inherited from the medieval world view or adapted from classical antiquity, which could be harnessed by the individual for use in discursive displays of power and identity – of personage and persona.³⁷ Thus, writes Charles Moseley, the story of Hercules ‘could not only call up a whole moral process, but could also be made to value and apply to a multiplicity of present issues and dilemmas’.³⁸ The richness, flexibility and polysemous nature of this vocabulary are its essential characteristics: ‘the strength of the Elizabethan image,’ notes Roy Strong, ‘lay in its capacity to be read and re-read many way and never to present a single outright statement which left no room for manoeuvre’.³⁹ A polysemous vocabulary maps easily onto the notion of the early modern self as personage and persona: rather than being ‘unified and autonomous’, it is understood instead to be ‘a provisional and contradictory self which is the product of discourse’.⁴⁰ The personage and personae which may be read in bodies of needlework assembled over time, such as the iconography of the embroidered gowns in Elizabeth’s wardrobe, or, as

(New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 29.

³⁷ Michael Bath provides an introduction to early modern symbolism in Chapter Two of *Speaking Pictures*, ‘Mundus Significans: The World of Symbols’, pp. 28-56. Crucial to the understanding of the function of Elizabethan and Jacobean elite domestic needlework is the notion of the *impresa*, the personal device which was the vehicle *par excellence* of persona and personage (see below, pp. 61-63).

³⁸ Charles Moseley, *A Century of Emblems: An Introductory Anthology* (Aldershot and Vermont: Scolar Press, 1989), p. 4.

³⁹ Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ Howard, p. 37.

I have argued in 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', the corpus of Mary Stuart's needlework, are revealed as discourses which have 'no single point of origin but constantly [evolve] in response to various forms of cultural authority, manifesting [themselves] both in literary paradigms and in the construction of actual lives.'⁴¹ The flexibility of the discourse of the self is amply demonstrated in Mary Stuart's embroidered gift, a signifier of mutually exclusive personage and persona. With rhetorically brilliant sleight of hand the gift simultaneously asserts Mary's royal personage in the symbolic form of the thistle on its embroidered surface, and her subservient persona as handmaid of Elizabeth.

Criticism investigating the constitutive power of objects sheds much light on what it calls 'the early modern self' and what I understand as the elite notion of social role, and the production of personage and persona. Property, this criticism suggests, equals selfhood. 'The histories of self and property are inseparable', acknowledged Richard Wilson in his study of testamentary practice in Shakespeare's England.⁴² He identifies a period of unparalleled liberty in the right to devise real property, from the passing of the Act of Wills in 1540 until 1640. During this period, Wilson argues, 'society negotiated new forms of self', and it is significant that it granted 'full and free liberty, power and authority to give, dispose, will and devise' all one's hereditaments at one's 'free will and pleasure' at a time when society was moving from a collective, communal conception of property ('recognition of kinship'), to one of capitalist ownership ('recognition of property').⁴³ An equation is proposed, that property equals selfhood. In a recent paper on *King Lear* Margreta de Grazia explores the terrifying implications of

⁴¹ Howard, p. 38.

⁴² Richard Wilson, *Will Power: Essays in Shakespearean Authority* (New York, London, Toronto and Sidney: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 202.

⁴³ Wilson, *Will Power*, pp. 202, 187.

the property-selfhood equation: ‘removing what a person *has* simultaneously takes away what a person *is* [...]. If having is tantamount to being, *not* having is tantamount to *non*-being – to being nothing.’⁴⁴ Since textile and needlework objects are such powerful signifiers in the business of projecting personage and persona, or social identity, it becomes easier to understand why the Shrewsburys were willing to go to law to establish ownership of the hangings.

The structure of this thesis is, like its scope, also defined by the available material. Three major corpora of needlework survive which can with certainty be linked with elite makers or owners: the textile collection assembled by Bess of Hardwick at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, the vestments stitched by Helena Wintour now held partly in private hands in Worcestershire and partly for the Jesuit College at Stonyhurst by the Whitworth Museum in Manchester, and the hangings jointly produced by Mary Stuart and Bess of Hardwick, now owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum and on loan to Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk. For Bess of Hardwick and Mary in particular, rich documentary contexts are available which facilitate a reading of their needlework texts. These three collections anchor three great axes of experience for elite women in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. I use these axes, social, religious and political, as the divisions for my three chapters, and undertake a close reading of each of the collections in case studies that follow each chapter.

Chapter One aims to reconsider the social, artistic and economic contexts and signifying systems within which and with which Elizabethan and Jacobean elite domestic

⁴⁴ Margreta de Grazia, ‘The Ideology of Superfluous Things: *King Lear* as Period Piece’, in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. by Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 17-42 (p. 21).

needlework was produced, and surveys the way in which needlework, both as practice and as object, functioned as a vehicle for projecting personage and persona into a social context. The material assembled here to create an index of the value systems within which needlework operated in this period necessarily draws from the limited evidence available. Twenty-seven women divided roughly equally between the reigns of Elizabeth and James contribute either needlework objects to this initial project, or information on their needlework practices. Of these twenty-seven, sixteen are countesses and a further five are other titled members of the aristocracy.⁴⁵ This general survey of needlework practices and objects functioning within elite society aims to produce a theoretical framework within which to read the needlework of Bess of Hardwick, whose textiles evidence the construction of a virtuous aristocratic persona proclaiming its self-assured place in the social hierarchy.

Chapter Two is the first study to consider the needlework of Elizabethan and Jacobean Catholics in the light of the Protestant proscription of iconic vestments. It recovers the history of lost needlework from English convents on the Continent and of the English recusants' covert provision of vestments to Jesuit missionaries. Although Helena Wintour's vestments were stitched around the middle of the seventeenth century, and therefore outside the Elizabethan and Jacobean parameters set for this thesis, hers are the only Catholic vestments surviving from the early modern period in England which can be linked with an individual maker. As such they provide a unique opportunity for interpretation which must be included in a study which seeks to read the embroidered texts of identifiable women.⁴⁶ The case study explores the vestments' relationship to the

⁴⁵ Between 1530 and 1603 the numbers of peers remained almost constant, increasing slightly from 50 to 55. By 1628 there were 126.

⁴⁶ It might be argued that the religious experience of Catholic Recusants throughout the reigns of Elizabeth, James, Charles and into the Commonwealth was in the nature of a continuum. Documents

liturgy and their iconographical importance to the Mass, and reads Wintour's Marian floral emblems and iconography alongside Hawkins's meditation handbook *Partheneia Sacra* to suggest that Wintour practised a Jesuit-led form of personal devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Chapter Three narrows the focus of the survey conducted in Chapter One to consider the specialised application of needlework gifts as political currency within patronage structures at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts. Particular attention is paid to the extensive correspondence of Bess of Hardwick's granddaughter Lady Arbella Stuart and the Jacobean diaries of Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery. Narrated with a contemporary vocabulary of grace, needlework gifts contributed to the construction of court-crown relations, symbolised by needlework gifts in Jacobean court masques. Needlework gifts, the Chapter argues, chart the way in which a 'feminine commonwealth' availed itself of power structures paralleling those of James's departments at the court of his consort. Women's political agency in this female political hierarchy is seen encoded within gifts of needlework in the final masque staged before the Queen's Court at Greenwich. The case study uses Mary Stuart's needlework gifts to Elizabeth I as an index of changes in their relationship. Mary's needlework is read alongside parallel texts such as poetry, portraiture and planned masques, to chart the development of an iconographical vocabulary centring on the Judgement of Paris, with which the two queens conducted a discourse of ascendancy.

such as the covenant which states that Wintour may not be compelled to travel more than two miles from her house, suggest that Wintour led a very secluded life (WRO BS 11768, ref. 705:331, parcel 7, no. 2).

CHAPTER ONE: EMBROIDERING IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

In 1646 Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Cumberland and Montgomery, commissioned a large-scale triptych, possibly from the portraitist Jan van Belcamp (fig. 1.1), in which a piece of painted embroidery plays a structural part.¹ The tripartite structure of the work as a whole constitutes a version of her family history and an iconic representation of her life, the left hand panel showing Clifford at the age of fifteen, and the right at fifty-six. The central panel, referred to by Anne as ‘the Great Picture’, contains the figures of her parents and two brothers (fig. 1.2). The Appleby triptych was commissioned whilst Anne was an unrepentant royalist in London, waiting out the period in which the Civil War grew ‘hotter and hotter’, under the protection of her estranged second husband Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.² She had recently finally secured her Northern estates, for forty years the subject of bitter legal disputes since the death of her father George Clifford, on the death in 1643 of the last remaining member of the male line, her cousin Henry, fifth Earl of Cumberland.

The picture is a vindication of those forty years of disenfranchisement, a powerful composition the elements of which are selected and arranged in such a way as to erase those years. It constitutes a statement about Clifford’s right to inherit (her two brothers having died in childhood) by setting out her immediate lineage, through her father (dressed as Queen’s Champion under his coat) and mother Margaret Russell, and stressing the maternal line by the inclusion of portraits of her aunts Lady Warwick, Lady Bath, Lady Wharton and the Countess of Derby, the panel framed by series of coats of

¹ Richard T. Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford: Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery (1590-1676)* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), gives a very full description and discussion pp. 181-98. The triptych is 9’ high and 18’ wide. The central ‘Great Picture’ is 10’ wide and each of the side panels is 4’ wide.

² Recollection cited unattributed in *Diary of Lady Anne Clifford*, ed. by D. J. H. Clifford (Stroud: Alan



Fig. 1.1 Jan van Belcamp (?): Appleby Triptych. Oil on panel, 1646 (Appleby Castle, Cumbria)



Fig. 1.2 Central panel of Appleby Triptych, *The Great Picture*

arms witnessing her more distant lineage. The whole is itself framed by two portraits of Clifford, the first at the age of fifteen, when she should have inherited, and the second at the age of fifty-six, when she finally did come into her estates.

The symmetrical dialogue between elements such as the piece of needlework, covered by a pattern book for embroidery on which Clifford's fifteen-year-old hand is resting (unfortunately not clearly visible in fig. 1.3), and by the bible upon which her hand rests in the right-hand portrait of Clifford at fifty-six, by the ordered books on the fifteen-year-old's shelves and the haphazard arrangement of those on the shelves of her fifty-six-year-old version, are significant. As Nanette Solomon recognises of renaissance portraiture in general, 'the fundamental structure of these pictures [...] inextricably links their visual form to their social function and thus openly expresses their dynamic role in the production of power relationships'.³ If this portrait has a more highly articulated social function beyond the simple interpretation sketched above, what part is played in the complex symmetry by needlework? How did the needlework fit into Clifford's life as a fifteen-year-old, or into the version of it constructed visually by the fifty-six-year-old? And why did Clifford choose to replace the needlework – and balance it, in the compositional summation of her life – with books alone in the right-hand panel?

The answers to these questions will become clear in the course of this chapter, which aims to reassess the contexts in which Elizabethan and Jacobean elite needlework was produced and exploited. After a brief examination of needlework in the life of the elite woman as young girl and housewife, in the first part of the Chapter I undertake a more

Sutton, 1990), p. 95.

³ Nanette Salomon, 'Positioning Women in Visual Convention: The Case of Elizabeth I', in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 64-95 (p. 64). This is also true for needlework pieces as a whole.



Fig. 1.3 Left hand panel of Appleby Triptych,
Anne Clifford aged fifteen

extended exploration of the physical space in which needlework was located, the country house, and the ways in which a virtuous persona was encoded within needlework, both practice and object. In the second part of the Chapter I examine how the elite woman, interacting with her social world, used needlework to mediate her social connections: how needlework asserted affective relations, in life to family members and social circles and in death, when testamentary practice records the value of needlework as object and as token of connection (and how, when social bonds were sundered by a husband's death, how needlework mediated the vexed sign of the widow to a suspicious society). In a third section which aims to recover a notion of the economic 'value' of needlework, I investigate the ways in which needlework, as the archetypal sign of luxury and superfluity, could also encode domestic economy and husbandry. In the fourth and last section I look in greater detail at the contention of the Introduction that needlework was valued as an important discursive tool, in an exploration of the intellectual resonance of needlework both for the needleworking woman and for her wider cultural context. By engaging in needlework, the Chapter will argue, the early modern woman could and did participate in an intellectual *vita contemplativa*.

Needlework, operating within interlocking systems of value, primarily functioned as a tool with which to create persona for public interpretation. The chapter will conclude with a study of the way one woman in the early modern period used needlework to create and project a public identity: Elizabeth Shrewsbury, 'Bess of Hardwick', whose remarkable textile collection still survives in large part at Hardwick Hall.

I: Needlework as Mediator: Embroidering a Social Identity

i: Education and Housewifery

Anne Clifford's left hand portrait panel sums up in visual terms the social education of a young aristocratic woman. It claims the acquisition of traditional accomplishments such as graceful deportment, music (in the viola da gamba leaning up against the table), needlework and a pattern book (on which her left hand is resting), and a sound intellectual education (in the books on the shelves).⁴ Such an education is represented formally in the panel by the portraits of Clifford's governess Mrs Anne Taylour, and her tutor Samuel Daniel, and its primary purpose would have been to equip her for a good marriage. Lady Grace Sherrington Mildmay describes her own education, at the hands of 'a Gentlewoman (Neece vnto my Father, &) brought vp by my mother from her chyldhood, whom after-ward she trusted to be gouernour ouer her owne children', who sent her 'furnished into the worlde':⁵

And when shee did see me idly disposed, shee would sett me to cipher
with my penn, & to cast vp and prooue grat summes and accomptes, &
sometymes set me to wryte a supposed letter to this or that body
concerning such & such things, & other tymes set me to reade in Dr
Turners Herball, & in Bartholomew Vigoe, [a medical textbook] & other
tymes set me to sing psalmes & somtymes set me to some curious worke
(for she was an excellent workewoman in all kynds of needlework, &

⁴ An account book kept when Clifford was a child, no longer extant, traces her education in needlework. 5s 0d were disbursed for 'litel silkworms', and 33s 0d for slea (or unravelled) silk, the largest sum paid out. The purchases are cited in G. C. Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery 1590-1676: Her Life, Letters, and Work: Extracted from all the Original Documents available, many of which are here printed for the first time* (Kendal: Wilson, 1922), p. 60.

⁵ Randall Martin, 'The Autobiography of Grace, Lady Mildmay', *Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme*, n.s. 18: o.s. 30 (1994), 33-81 (pp. 45, 49). Martin transcribes selected passages from Mildmay's autobiography. Linda Pollock prints a modernised text of Mildmay's autobiography, and extracts from her spiritual meditations and medical papers in *With Faith and Physic: The Life of A Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620* (London: Collins & Brown, 1993). Grace Mildmay (1552-1620) was the daughter of Sir Henry Sherrington of Lacock Abbey and Anne Paget and the wife of Sir Anthony Mildmay, second son of Sir Walter Mildmay

most curiously shee would performe it).⁶

The skills learned had a two-fold purpose. Generally, such an education was aimed at forming a virtuous and pious character. More particularly, it was intended to train a woman for domestic usefulness: to enable a wife to take up her position as the lady of her husband's house.⁷ She was expected to be a good administrator, to dispense medicines, to perform the social duties of hospitality, and to do credit in public to her husband. She was also responsible for the household textiles. Lady Grace Mildmay's account of her day-to-day activities in her autobiography describes a life which maps perfectly onto the accepted role of the elite housewife in Elizabethan and Jacobean England:

First in diuinitie euery daye as my leisure would giue me leaue [...] I did read [...].

Also euery daye I spent some tyme in playing on my lute, & setting songs of 5 partes therevnto & practised my voice in singing of psalmes, & in making my prayers to God [...]. Also euery daye I spent some tyme in the Herball & bookes of phisick, & in ministring to one or other [...]. Also euery daye I spent some tyme in workes of myne owne inuention without sample of drawing or patterne before me for carpett of Cushion worke & to drawe flowers & fruites to theyr lyfe wth my plummett vpon paper.⁸

Although Grace Mildmay's life as she describes it was in the main quiet and retired, she was also an accomplished hostess, entertaining James I on two occasions at the

⁶ Martin, p. 47.

⁷ On the education of the early modern elite woman see, for example, Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for a Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Margaret J. M. Edzell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Women: A Sourcebook. Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁸ Martin, pp. 59-60.

Mildmay's country house, Apethorpe.⁹ The duties expected of Lady Elizabeth Littleton Willoughby, wife of Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton Hall in Nottingham (figs. 1.4a-b) echo those of Mildmay. Together with her lady-in-waiting and gentlewoman, she was required 'to oversee the care of the children [...], produce and care for the fine needlework used in the household, to entertain herself and any company who visited by playing the virginals, to play cards or pass the time in conversation'.¹⁰ When Ben Jonson wished to demonstrate the virtuous 'high housewifery' of Barbara Gamage Sidney in his encomiastic portrait of a household 'To Penshurst', he employed her efficient management of the household linen as trope: 'nigh, | When she was far; and not a room but dressed | As if it had expected such a guest'.¹¹ 'High housewifery' was characterised by the production, care and management of the household textiles, including the linen, the wardrobe and the furnishings.

Needleworking was lodged firmly in a moral context. Needlework kept women's hands busy, and protected them, therefore, from the vice of idleness. The noblewoman's domestic responsibility extended to protecting the virtue of all the female members of the household, which she exercised by example. The biography of Anne Dacres, the Catholic wife of martyr Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, pictures her executing her household textile duties as a pattern of virtue as she kept the women servants 'ever busy

⁹ Pollock, p. 20.

¹⁰ Alice Friedman, *House and Household in Elizabethan England: Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 46. Elizabeth Willoughby was the daughter of Sir John Littleton of Frankley. The Willoughby marriage in 1564 was the subject of controversy: Francis had refused to marry Elizabeth Knollys, daughter of his guardian. Elizabeth Willoughby's great-great-grand-daughter Cassandra Willoughby-Bryges, Duchess of Charnos, collated the family papers of which extracts are published as 'An Account of the Willoughby's of Wollaton, taken out of the Pedigree, old Letters, and old Books of Accounts, in my Brother Sir Thomas Willoughby's Study, Dec., A.D. 1702, by Cass[andra] Willoughby', in HMC, *Middleton (Wollaton Hall)*, pp. 504-610. Subsequent references are given in the text.

¹¹ (ll. 85-88), in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), VIII: *The Poems, the Prose Works*, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (1947), pp. 93-94.

in works [...]. None were permitted to be idle at any time, and for that end she commonly kept one in the house who had the skill of making carpets, to whose help she used to send all such as had by any reason no certain thing to do'.¹² The daughter of fellow Catholic Elizabeth Tanfield Cary, Lady Falkland, noted in her biography of her mother that Cary 'was very careful and diligent in the disposition of the affairs of her house of all sorts; and she herself would work hard, together with her women and her maids, curious pieces of work, teaching them, and directing them'.¹³

Needlework, then, was a sign which encoded both outcomes of an elite female education in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. It was simultaneously the proof of virtuous character and of skilled domestic management. Both significances are implicit in the above accounts, in their emphasis of the production of needlework as one of the duties of the housewife, and both must be understood within the wider significance of the function of textiles within the country house.

ii: Needlework in the Country House

A central characteristic of the ceremonial hospitality for which the Elizabethan and Jacobean country house was the setting is emphasised in a set of household regulations from 1605. In the Great Chamber of the country house 'the eyes of all the best sort of strangers be there lookers on'.¹⁴ This regulation encapsulates what has been recognised by the major studies of the social function of the country houses: ceremonial hospitality

¹² *Lives of Philip Howard [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, ed. by the Duke of Norfolk (London: Hurst and Blacket, 1857), p. 238.

¹³ Elizabeth Cary, *The Lady Falkland, The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry, with The Lady Falkland: Her Life, by one of her Daughters*, ed. by Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 191.

¹⁴ 'A Breviate touching the Order and Government of a Nobleman's House', from a manuscript from the library of the first Marquis of Donegall, in *Archaeologia*, 13 (1800), pp. 315-89, cited in Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 88.

was very much a matter of *visual* display.¹⁵

The state apartments were the magnificent showpiece of the house. Made up of a Great Chamber or Hall, a Withdrawing Chamber, State Bedrooms and one or more Galleries, the state apartments were used for ceremonial receptions, feasting, masques and music, for audiences and for indoor recreations of all sorts.¹⁶ They were designed for the performance of a politics of hospitality which sought to display the identity of the householder and family for the benefit of 'the eyes of all the best sort of strangers', and define and strengthen their relationships within a social hierarchy:

Through the decoration of such rooms, the owner shows not so much his good taste, as his public and private values, his education, sententious wisdom, and often enough his piety and doctrinal persuasion.¹⁷

To display, in other words, *persona*. Furnishings played a central role in the overall programme of visual display of persona: Peter M. Daly's study of emblems in the applied arts of the English Renaissance, 'England and the Emblem: The Cultural Context of English Emblem Books' provides a useful survey. He identifies needlework and embroidery in particular as an important vehicle for such display within the context of the country house, 'whether used as cushion covers, table carpets, decorative panels for wall-hangings, or simply to embellish garments'.¹⁸ Valances and hangings for beds, embroidered clothing in painting and gifts of embroidery may be added to Daly's list.

¹⁵ Major studies of Elizabethan and Jacobean country houses have been undertaken by Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, and Robert Smythson and the *Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); Alice Friedman *House and Household*; Eric Mercer, 'The Houses of the Gentry', *Past and Present*, 5 (1954), 11-32; and Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

¹⁶ See, for example, Girouard, *Life in the Country House*, pp. 88-102.

¹⁷ Bath, *Speaking Pictures*, p. 14.

¹⁸ Daly, 'England and the Emblem', pp. 20-25 (p. 20).

Needlework and embroidery for furnishing and clothing was commissioned from professionals or bought in, as noted above, but so much work was done domestically that it merited dedicated architectural space. Rooms were furnished with embroidery frames for the purpose, 'diverse tents to serve for the embroyderers' being recorded in the Wardrobe at Hengrave Hall, and 'nyne payre of beams for embroderers' at Hardwick New Hall, in 'a roome at the wardrop dore'.¹⁹ A special 'little vawte' was recorded at Chatsworth in 1601 in 'the little Closet at the wardrop dore' containing 'a frame to weyve Carpetes'.²⁰ Many household accounts list specialist embroiderers employed as draftsmen to 'draw forthe' works, but also as technicians to help complete more complex pieces: in 1574 Mary Stuart complained that she could not complete a head-dress for Elizabeth I without help, and later in the same year she complained again that she could not make what she wanted without more staff, and asked particularly for a Madame Rallay and her daughter to help her design and make her needleworked pieces.²¹ Other servants were involved as required, Bess's 'grooms, women and some boys I kept', for example. In all textile affairs, including needlework and embroidery, the elite housewife managed and supervised.

Some indication of the relationship between the textile duties of the elite housewife in such a household, architectural space and the centrality of display may be gauged from the documents which chart the unhappy marriage of Elizabeth Willoughby (figs. 1.4a and b). The arguments she had with her husband over the management of the household

¹⁹ 'A True Inventory of all such household stuffe, plate jewelless, redy money, cattell, come and other goods and chattels [...] of Sir Thomas Kytson [...] at the time of his death', dated 29 March-1 April 1603, in John Gage, *History & Antiquities of Hengrave* (London: Carpenter and others, 1822), pp. 21-37 (p. 35); *Of Household Stuff: the 1601 Inventories of Bess of Hardwick*, ed. by Santina M. Levey and Peter K. Thornton, (London: National Trust, 2001), p. 45

²⁰ Levey and Thornton, p. 23.

²¹ Letter dated 8 May 1574 from Mary Stuart to de la Mothe Fénélon, cited in Labanoff, v, p. 222.



Figs. 1.4a and b George Gower: Sir Francis and Elizabeth Willoughby. 1573 (Lord Middleton)

frequently took place in front of important guests. On one undated occasion she was recorded making 'many [...] disrespectfull speaches' to Sir Francis, and a row developed during which she told all present (including Sir Fulke Greville), that 'she would not be ruled by him' (p. 546). The consequences were terrible. Sir Francis left shortly afterwards to go to London, and left a set of household orders which disenfranchised his wife from her duties in the house:

That those persons which I have discharged from my house do not [...] have any conversation with my wife [...]. That she shall have nothing to do with the children [...]. That the household shall be ordered by the discretion of Draycotte and Cludde [...]. That my wife shall not discharge or receive any servant [...]. [That no horses] be employed at my wife's command. [...] That who I shall appoint doe keep the chamber where the stuff is laid, and not suffer my wife to buy or lay any other stuff there. That she shall have no authority to command anything in the house except necessary diet for herself. That [...] she shall not send any servant of any message to any place. [...] That the children doe goe to bed strait after eight a clock at night, and are made ready before eight a clock in the morning. And after it is nine a clock at night, nobody must be in the great chamber, but that the fire be raked up and the door locked (p. 548)

Francis Willoughby seeks to punish his wife for not keeping her place and refusing to 'be ruled by him' by stripping her of her housewifery. All the duties which defined Elizabeth Willoughby as a personage of importance were denied her. She was forbidden access to the single most important room in the house where her status should be visible, the great chamber, and forbidden command of the room in the house which was the housewife's particular domain, 'the chamber where the stuff is laid', the linens and fabrics the management of which marked her as virtuous housewife. Unable to leave the house, she was to all intents and purposes, isolated and imprisoned. And barred from discharging her position in the household, Elizabeth Willoughby was

effectively stripped of her public identity. In reaction to the destruction of her personage by these new household orders, Elizabeth Willoughby sought to destroy herself, and the tool by which she sought to effect her suicide was a sign of her housewifery: her embroidery scissors. For as Sir Francis reported to his father-in-law, ‘she fell into a most violent passion, threatening to make away with herself, and being denied a knife would have struck her scissors into her belly if she had not been prevented’ (p. 547).

iii: Needlework-as-practice and Needlework-as-object: Embroidering the Virtuous Persona

The mechanisms by which persona is created and interpreted through needlework are visible in an episode of Philip Sidney’s *Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*. Pamela, the imprisoned daughter of the King of Arcadia, is visited by her captor Cecropia and is discovered in the act of embroidering:

Cecropia (threatening in herself to run a more rugged race with her) went to [Philoclea’s] sister Pamela, who that day (having wearied herself with reading, and with the height of her heart disdaining to keep company with any of the gentlewomen appointed to attend her, whom she accounted her jailers), was working upon a purse certain roses and lilies, as by the fineness of the work one might see she had borrowed her wits of the sorrow that then owed them, and lent them wholly to that exercise. For the flowers she had wrought carried such life in them that the cunningest painter might have learned of her needle, which with so pretty a manner made his careers to and fro through the cloth as if the needle itself would have been loath to have gone fromward such a mistress, but that it hoped to return thitherward very quickly again; the cloth looking with many eyes upon her, and lovingly embracing the wounds she gave it. The shears also were at hand to behead the silk that was grown too short: and if at any time she put her mouth to bite it off, it seemed that

where she had been long in making of a rose with her hands, she would in an instant make roses with her lips, as the lilies seemed to have their whiteness rather of the hand that made them than of the matter whereof they were made, and that they grew there by the suns of her eyes, and were refreshed by the most in discomfort- comfortable air which an unawares sigh might bestow upon them. But the colours for the ground were so well chosen – neither sullenly dark nor glaringly lightsome, and so well proportioned as that, though much cunning were in it, yet it was but to serve for an ornament of the principal work – that it was not without marvel to see how a mind, which could cast a careless semblant upon the greatest conflicts of fortune could command itself to take care for so small matters.²²

Sidney makes clear that the actions and manner of the embroidering woman, and embroidered details, are signifiers. The ‘fineness of the work’ is illustrative of her sorrowful wits. The embroidered roses are metonyms for the shape formed by her lips, pursed to bit the thread. The whole picture she presents as she sits working is interpreted by the observer as evidence of the quality of ‘her mind’. Pamela is the object of a triple gaze, that of the writer/observer, of the scrutiny of her own mind ‘which could command itself’, but also of ‘the cloth looking with many eyes upon her’. This triple gaze is the essence of the production of early modern persona: the elite mind ‘which could command itself’, projects a version of itself, a persona, towards its elite social context, expert reader of systems of signs. It is made clear here that the signs the mind projects are actions, but also objects (the needleworked purse) which themselves transact. They are the focus of signification, the lens through which ‘many eyes’ gaze, filter and interpret information about the early modern self of which they are externalisations. Thus, Pamela’s embroidered purse communicates information about

²² Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, ed. by Maurice Evans (London: Penguin, 1977), Book III, Chapter 10, pp. 483-84.

her: 'by the fineness of the work, one might see she had borrowed her wits of the sorrow that then owed them'; 'the colours for the ground were so well chosen [...] and so well-proportioned [...] that [...]'. According to the narrative the images of roses and lilies wrought on the purse signify in Pamela a superlatively skilful creativity, and mark her as the traditional courtly love-object of the romance tradition. Her sun-like eyes are the life-giving energy which sustains the lilies, the roses grow at a touch from her lips, the lilies are inspired by her fair skin. Behind the conventional equations of idealised natural qualities with aristocratic women, and the familiar system of significant correspondences, there lies a social reality: objects, things, material possessions, all had a 'social life'.²³

Behind the courtly conventions of Sidney's romance narrative lies an understanding of actual social signifying structures. Two embroidered purses, contemporary with the writing of the *Arcadia*, are illustrated in fig. 1.5. Although the names of their makers and the circumstances of their making have been lost, the *Arcadia* provides a context within which their making may be understood. Purses that have survived, notes textile historian John Nevinson, 'show no signs of wear; evidently they were not in general use or carried in the ordinary way'.²⁴ 'Endowing purses', originating in pre-Reformation England, had a place in the rituals of love and marriage until the end of the seventeenth century.²⁵ Made to be filled with coins given symbolically to the bride by the groom, purses were also created as love tokens. Pamela's purse is interpreted as one such token:

²³ The phrase achieved wide currency with Arjun Appadurai's edited volume, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁴ John L. Nevinson, *Catalogue of English Domestic Embroidery of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: HMSO, 1938), p. 96.

²⁵ On embroidered purses see Xanthe Brooke, *Lady Lever Art Gallery: Catalogue of Embroideries* (Stroud, Glos.: Sutton, 1992), p. 254.



Fig. 1.5 Two purses, (left, with pincushion) embroidered with rose and pansies, (right) with rose, pansy, carnation, honeysuckle and grapes. Early 17th c (Victoria and Albert Museum)

[Cecropia] sate down by Pamela, and taking the purse, and with affected curiosity looking upon the work, 'Full happy is he', said she, '— at least if he knew his own happiness — to whom a purse in this manner, and by this hand wrought, is dedicated; in faith, he shall have cause to account it not as a purse for treasure, but as a treasure itself, worthy to be pursed up in the purse of his own heart'.²⁶

The episode from the *Arcadia* makes clear that needlework-as-practice signified particularly within the discourses of those aristocratic skills which the young woman was to acquire through her education. The image of Pamela sewing is the sign of an upbringing which was sufficiently leisured to afford the time to learn those skills which were proper to the nobility: Pamela is 'such a mistress' of her art, in the same way as the 'ulterior [...] ground' of manners was, for the American industrial leisure class, 'to be sought in the honorific character of that leisure or non-productive employment of time and effort without which good manners are not acquired'.²⁷ Or, in other words, it is not enough to do needlework, the aristocratic woman must do it *properly*. William Drummond in 1619 indicated this value system when he wrote to tell Ben Jonson of a bed of state embroidered by Mary Stuart which he had seen on his travels: 'the workmanship is curiously done, and above all value, and truly it may be of this Piece said *Materiam superabat opus*' ('the workmanship was superior to the materials/subject matter').²⁸ Drummond's comment indicates how the courtly skill of needlework, the sign of elite female accomplishment, was valued far above the economic imperative of working class skill on which so much aristocratic display depended, and which was valued so cheaply in terms of labour cost.

²⁶ Sidney, *Arcadia*, p. 484.

²⁷ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York and London: MacMillan, 1899), p. 48.

²⁸ William Drummond to Ben Jonson, 1 July 1619, cited in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), I (1925; corr. edn. 1954), p. 210.

Criticism has, until fairly recently, tended unquestioningly to employ twentieth century assumptions to define early modern needlework as a 'craft', distinct from a skilled 'art form'. 'In the second half of the 16th century,' asserted Wingfield-Digby,

embroidery was a craft; it was a process of manufacture where the hand and energy of the individual played a leading role, and it flowered into art when conditions permitted and according to the creativity and talents of the mind and hand that worked it.²⁹

Wingfield-Digby's notion of 'art' crucially prioritised display of technical virtuosity and unique inventiveness or individualism, which lead him to dismiss as artistically valueless what may in another light be seen to be highly significant texts, as, for example, in the case of a pair of cushions worked by Mary, Queen of Scots (shown in the final case study in figs. M13-14):

The design consists of entwined oval compartments filled with flowers, on which cartouches (or ovals) worked in a different way are superimposed, showing individual taste and imagination which, none the less, suffers very slightly from clumsiness in the total effect. The cushions give the impression of something done once, never to be repeated; yet as they are a work of applied art, this entails a certain gaucheness and lack of polish.³⁰

Many other critics have felt the technical capabilities, sophistication and aesthetics of English artistic production up to the second quarter of the seventeenth century to be

hopelessly second-rate [...] the figure style of English Renaissance artists and the sense of proportion of its architects have often been found wanting. The portraits and effigies are wooden, and they lack that sophistication of presentation ordained by contemporary European styles

²⁹ Wingfield-Digby, p. 23.

³⁰ Wingfield-Digby, p. 34. For a discussion of the iconographical significance of these cushions, see 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', pp. 57-58, 69.

such as Mannerism.’³¹

The problem with these views is that they fail to consider an Early Modern understanding of what constituted art and its function for its consumers.

Notions of ‘clumsiness’, ‘gaucheness’ and ‘lack of polish’, or compositional ‘naivete’ such as gross inaccuracies of scale were not applied to artistic composition by the Elizabethan and Jacobean. In an important study Lucy Gent has reassessed the notions of artistic merit and value in England between 1560 and 1620, and by studying the language used to discuss art, has discovered that all artistic media enjoyed equal consideration, in contrast to the Continent, where more sophisticated aesthetics prevailed. In England, the visual image was prioritised over accepted distinctions between the arts:

‘picture’ in the late sixteenth century in England was an extraordinarily wide and vague word; it covered not only painting [...] and the art of sculpture [...] but also tapestry, heraldry, embroidery, marquetry, impresse and emblems [...] it could mean, in short, anything to do with a visual image, though not necessarily a visible image; a poet’s description could be a picture too.³²

Much of what Gent discovers in her analysis of the language used to talk about the visual arts enables us to revalue and reassess the status of elite domestic needlework as art in the English Renaissance. In fact, it restructures our twentieth century notions of

³¹ Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry 1560-1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in the English Renaissance* (Leamington Spa: James Hall, 1981), arguing for a critical re-evaluation of early modern art (p. 4). Even recent critics have drawn the dividing line between art and craft along lines of social recognition rather than aesthetic values, pointing out that the Company of Broderers were accorded the status of professional craftsmen rather than artists elevated in an academy, and seen from this angle, the conclusion is reached that ‘the arts in England were still very much crafts’ (Stephen Orgel, ‘The Renaissance Artist as Plagiarist’, *ELH*, 48 (1981), 476-87 (pp. 487-88)). In considering the cultural understanding of needlework to be the province of a profession (of ‘craftsmen’), Orgel renders invisible the function of needlework, domestically produced or otherwise, for the aristocratic elite women who are the subject of this study. Much of the skewed view of English art of the period is surely due to critical prioritisation of the values of the Italian Renaissance.

³² Gent, *Picture and Poetry*, p. 6.

value and merit. ‘To draw’, for example, ‘for the Elizabethan means, typically, to put down the first rude draft [...] and has the connotation of imperfection and crudity, not artistry’.³³ Rarely, she says, was drawing associated with a notion of skill in the sixteenth century: ‘the English tradition of drawing was not considered an “art”, but a functional technique appropriate to certain professional competences’.³⁴ Underdrawing was variously referred to as a ‘trick’ or ‘purfle’, and elite needlewomen like Mary Stuart and Bess of Hardwick employed embroiderers to ‘draw forthe’ works.³⁵ The laurels of ‘artistry’ were not accorded to these draftsmen. If the elite woman undertook the drawing herself, like Grace Mildmay, it had a subordinate function to needlework, as Richard Mulcaster implies: ‘if she is to adorn some high position she must acquire suitable accomplishments,’ including drawing, ‘to beautify [her] needlework’.³⁶

In the English Renaissance conception of value and skill, drawing was inferior to the addition of colour, ‘until the 1580s, and for many until long after, [...] the chief criterion of painting’:

‘Lively colours’ are what many men immediately thought of when the subject of praiseworthy painting came up; and ‘lively colours’ – not perspective, not shadow – were in their eyes, what allowed the skilful painter to achieve life-likeness. Thus, as late as the 1620s, Robert Burton describes the illustrations to bestiaries and similar books as showing their subjects ‘truly expressed in lively colours’, and to Henry Hawkins, in 1633, integrity of mind is ‘the livelie coulour of God’.³⁷

³³ Gent, *Picture and Poetry*, pp. 9-10.

³⁴ Gent, *Picture and Poetry*, p. 12.

³⁵ Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, pp. 41-43, 70.

³⁶ Richard Mulcaster (1561), cited without further reference in Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School: A Study of Women's Education through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 192-93.

³⁷ Gent, *Picture and Poetry*, pp. 17-18. Gent adds, ‘the emphasis still survives in the expression ‘to paint someone in his true colours’.

And in the application of colour lay the ‘art’ of the embroiderer. It is

the application of colours, which, if well done, shows that the painter is an artist, not a crude workman. Thus Lyly describes ‘the *Elizabeth* of *Euphues*’ as ‘but shadowed for others to vernish, but begun for others to ende, but drawen with a black coale, for others to blaze with a bright coulour’.³⁸

This repositioning of value makes intelligible to us the frequent references to needleworked images as perfectly lifelike in eulogistic texts such as tomb inscriptions: ‘Curious Knots, or Trails, what fancie could devise, | Beasts, Birds or Flowers, even as things natural’.³⁹ Often the needlewoman was even credited with producing images that were more ‘real’ than nature itself.

It is a commonplace that the image of the ‘patient’, ‘industrious’ needlewoman is an icon of womanly submissiveness. But when needlework is recontextualised as artistic practice, the virtues of patience and industry become visible in a different light. They turn out to be intimately associated in the early modern mind with other accomplishments required of the elite, namely artistic invention and achievement: ‘industrious study’ coupled with ‘putting in practice, with patience’, will make of the artist ‘a juditious inuentor’, who ‘shall attain vnto better perfection then the other, who is naturally imbued with the dexterite, without industry and patience’.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gent, p. 19, citing John Lyly, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit; Euphues & His England*, ed. by Morris William Croll and Harry Clemens (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 434. Lyly’s examples of worthy workers include ‘the worm that spinneth the silk’, which ‘is to be esteemed though she cannot work the sampler’ (p. 433).

³⁹ Tomb inscription for one Elizabeth Lucar (Rozsika Parker, p. 75).

⁴⁰ Paolo Lomazzo, *A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Caruinge & Buildinge*, trans. by Haydocke (Oxford: Barnes, 1598), cited in Norman K. Farmer, Jr., *Poets and the Visual Arts in Renaissance England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 10. C.f. also Desdemona, ‘so delicate with her needle, and admirable musician [...] of so high and plenteous wit and invention’ (*Othello*, IV.1.183-6, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1989)). All subsequent references to the works of Shakespeare are taken from this edition).

A particular area where the creation of persona was also understood to be a particular skill proper to the aristocracy was in the form of the *impresa*, where, in William Drummond's definition, 'the figures expresse and illustrate the one part of the author's intention, and the word the other [...] to represent themselves'.⁴¹ Claude Paradin in the preface to *Devises Heroïques*, his 1557 volume of *imprese* which was a popular source for embroidery, identifies the *impresa* as being the province of '*les grans Rois, Princes, & Potentaz*'.⁴² Sir Thomas Tresham noted in a memorandum of 1597 that their interpretation was held to be a matter of skill: 'in impresees ys observed to bee so putt downe as differ from vulgar apprehension and yett wyll be redely bee interpreted by men of skylle, especially yf skylled in that wherein the imprese or figuratore sene reacheth unto'.⁴³ Although Drummond refers to the 'author' and Tresham to 'men of skylle', women too embroidered *imprese*. Whilst imprisoned with the Shrewsbury's in 1569, Mary Stuart received Elizabeth's envoy Nicholas White sitting under her cloth of estate. In his report to William Cecil he noted particularly his vain efforts to unravel the secret meaning of the cloth of state and of one of its embroidered *imprese*, a phoenix with its motto *En ma fin gît mon commencement*, 'a riddle I understand not'.⁴⁴

Embroidered emblems and *imprese* are frequently seen in the sumptuous gowns of portraits. A portrait at Parham Park, for example, said to be of Eleanor Verney, god-daughter to Elizabeth I, shows her wearing a velvet gown elaborately embroidered with pillars adapted from Paradin's emblem of the pillars of Hercules the motto of which is

⁴¹ William Drummond, *The Works of Drummond of Hawthornden* (Edinburgh: Watson, 1711; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), p. 228-29, cited in Bath, pp. 19-20.

⁴² Claude Paradin, *Devises Heroïques*, 2nd edn (Lyons: Tournes and Gazeau, 1557; repr. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p. 3.

⁴³ Memorandum dated 15 July 1597, HMC, *Miscellaneous*, series 55, III (Tresham Papers), p. 91.

⁴⁴ Letter to Sir William Cecil dated 26 February 1569, transcribed in full in *Letters of Mary Queen of Scots and Documents Connected with her Personal History, Now First Published*, ed. by Agnes Strickland, 2 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1843) II, pp. 379-84. The episode is analysed by Daly, 'England and the Emblem', pp. 23-24. A phoenix emblem embroidered by Mary is shown in fig. 2.11.

‘Hee conceiveth hope to proceed further’ (figs 1.6 and 1.7).⁴⁵ Perhaps Eleanor Verney is making statements about her loyalty to the crown, wearing her heart, as it were, on her sleeve, but a more detailed reading of the social or political needs hinted at by the portrait embroidery has not so far proved feasible. Verney’s ruff and muff (fig 1.17) have further minutely detailed emblems, worked in silks and seed pearls, the meaning of which is lost.⁴⁶

The embroidered symbols in such portraiture are often not strictly emblems, in the technical meaning of the word, nor imprese. Both forms are essentially characterised, as Drummond says, by a ‘figure’ and a ‘word’. Whilst embroidered emblems and imprese of this kind do exist (examples by Bess of Hardwick and Mary Stuart are illustrated in fig. 1.10, and in figs. B.5 and M.23 below, where they are discussed further), I would argue that many embroidery objects and embroidery in portraiture signify with a range of symbolic motifs which, though they lack mottoes, are *impresa-like* in the way they harness the *mundus significans* for the purpose of creating persona and personage. Harnessed by the elite, in the words of Drummond, ‘to represent themselves’.

Thus iconographical claims to virtuous personae are frequently staked in embroidered objects, with countless personifications of the cardinal and other virtues – virtues which are reinforced in the practice of embroidering itself, actively emblematic of chastity, patience, industry (the personified virtues on Bess of Hardwick’s Lucretia hanging are prime examples). Biblical and mythological stories wrought in needlework functioned as blazons of virtue, such as the story of that paragon of embroidering virtue Philomel,

⁴⁵ Paradin, pp. 29-31. Discussed and illustrated in Arnold, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁶ Arnold suggests that the ruff and muff may have been gifts originally presented to Queen Elizabeth (p. 87). For a discussion of the part played by needlework gifts in court patronage networks, see Chapter 3 of the present study.

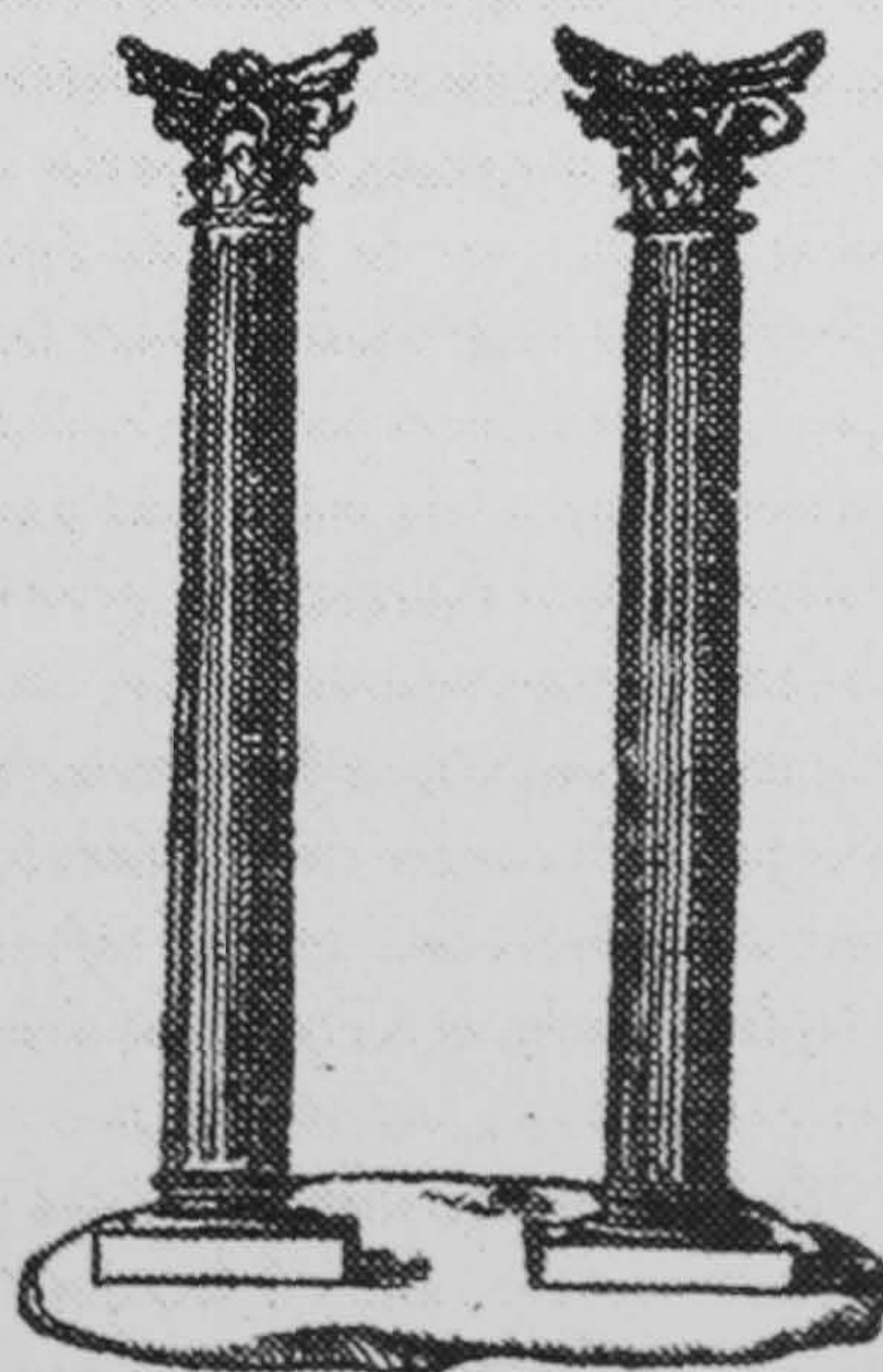


Fig. 1.6 Attr. William Segar: Elizabeth Verney, Mrs Palmer, wearing gown embroidered with emblematic pillars. Panel painting, c. 1590 (Parham Park)

HEROÏQUES.

29

Plus outre.



Charles v. de ce nom, Empereur de l'Empire Romain, aujourdhui fait sa Devise de deux Colonnes, que l'antiquité ha nommé, les deux Colonnes d'Hercules. Qui sont deux eminentes montaignes, ou promontoires, distantes l'une de l'autre d'environ sept cens pas. L'une en Mauritanie, du côté d'Afrique, nommée Abila, l'autre au

Fig. 1.7 'Plus Ultra' emblem from Claude Paradin's *Devises Heroiques*.

who, tongueless, narrated her rape and mutilation in a design woven into cloth before her translation into a nightingale. A valance in the Metropolitan Museum of New York shows a stark-eyed Philomel, her wool-working transposed into a more contemporary medium, needlework, a nightingale waiting quietly on the ground at her side (fig. 1.8). A common understanding of symbolic meanings was encoded by embroidered flowers, fruit, trees, birds and beasts, designs for which were taken from herbals and continental books of prints, as well as from more specific emblem books. Thus visitors to Anne Clifford's house at Dalemain, for example, would have read the pineapples held by the four figures embroidered onto the bed furnishings as encoding hospitality, one of the ordering principles of her later life, as shown in her diaries and autobiography.⁴⁷

II: Needlework as Relationship: Embroidering Social Connections

Elizabethan and Jacobean needlework, both practice and object, was a site for figuring forth the persona of the educated, virtuous elite woman. It mediated between the elite individual woman and her social context, and in this sense it was a generalised sign. But domestic needlework was also used on a more particularly personal level, to mediate between the individual woman and other individuals. Part of the work needlework did, in other words, was to embroider social connections.

Social connections are nowhere more visible than in the documentation and literature attendant upon death. The appearance of needlework in epitaphs, in commemorative poems, as memorials to the dead and in testamentary bequests speaks much of needlework's power to memorialise both deceased individuals, and their social ties. In

⁴⁷ For the contemporary symbolism of the pineapple, see <http://www.levins.com/pineapple.html>.



Fig. 1.8 Valance for a bed showing Philomel embroidering her history (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Ightham Church, Kent, there is an alabaster monument on the east wall of the chancel to the right of the altar, commemorating the life of Lady Dorothy Selby, wife of Sir William Selby of Ightham Mote, erected following her death on 15 March 1641. In an oval recess of the monument stands a fine bust showing Dame Dorothy at 69, the age she died, dressed in widow's clothes with her hand on an embroidery frame. An epitaph is incised below:

D.D.D.

To the pretious name and honour of Dorothy Selby,
the relict of Sir William Selby, Knt
The only daughter and heir of Charles Bonham, Esq.
She was a Dorcas
Whose curious Needle turn'd th'abused Stage
Of this leud world into the Golden Age,
Whose Pen of Steele and silken inck enroll'd
The Acts of Jonah in Records of Gold.
Whose arte disclos'd that Plot which, had it taken,
Rome had tryumph'd and Britain's walls had shaken;
In heart a Lydia and in tongue a Hanna,
In Zeale a Ruth, in Wedlock a Susanna;
Prudently simple, providently Wary,
To th'world a Martha and to Heaven a Mary.

Dorothy Selby's funerary monument makes a triple claim on the memorialising power of needlework. The epitaph talks about the histories wrought in needlework with a 'Pen of Steele' and 'silken incke' as though they were literary works, and the effigy drives home the message in the embroidery frame upon which Selby's hand rests. Thirdly, carved into the oval recess behind Selby's bust are engravings of two of these needlework pieces, the 'Golden Age' of the Garden of Eden on the left, and the Gunpowder Plot 'disclos'd' on the right, together with a representation of the Spanish Armada. The needlework piece from which the (simplified) engraving was made is still

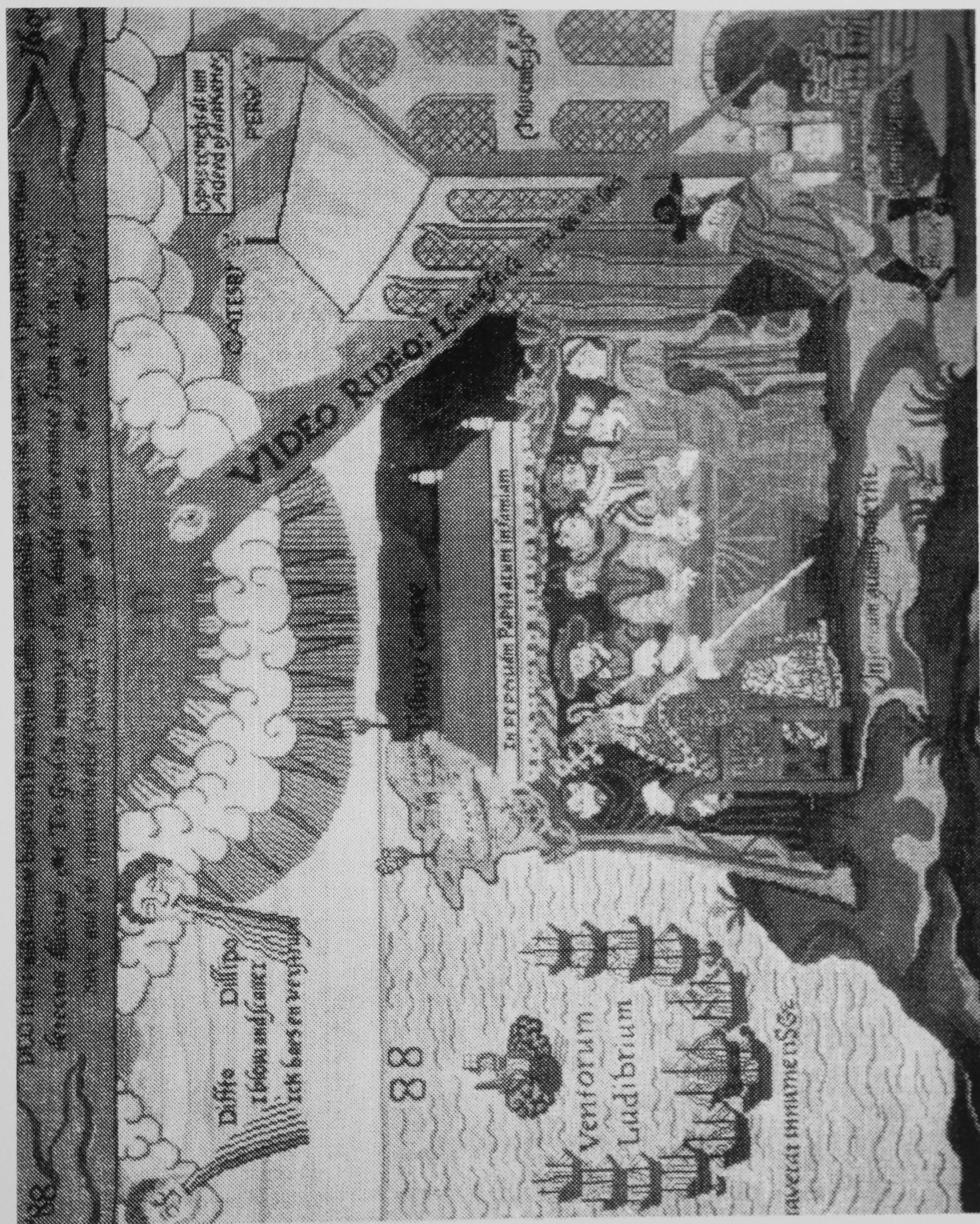


Fig. 1.9. Dorothy Selby: 'The Double Deliveraunce'. Tent-stitch picture, after 1621 (private collection)

in the family's possession, and is illustrated in fig. 1.9.⁴⁸ The epitaph's phrase 'whose arte disclos'd that Plot' gave rise to a popular idea (which persisted for some time, fuelled by the arguments of Katherine Esdaile in *Country Life*) that the identities of the Gunpowder Plot perpetrators were first revealed in Selby's needlework.⁴⁹ The notion was incontrovertibly disproved when the source of the needlework picture was identified as an engraving published in Amsterdam in 1621 and designed by Samuel Ward, a Puritan preacher from Ipswich.

The embroidery is a complex conception showing on the left the winds of heaven scattering the numberless ships of the Armada, and on the right 'Faux' creeping towards the gunpowder barrels stacked under the houses of Parliament, the heads of Catesby and Percy on stakes above its gable ends. In the centre of the composition the Pope is sitting at a table with the devil and several priests and friars, and the whole is unified by Latin tags scattered throughout the surface, translations in English and an overarching dedication: 'to God in memorye of his double deliveraunce'.⁵⁰

It is with such a political statement that Selby prefers to be remembered. Combined with the loyal depiction of the foiled Plot, the choice of the 'Golden Age' as a subject to embroider and to stand as memorial employs Stuart royal mythmaking to record Selby's loyalty to the Jacobean and subsequently Caroline crown.⁵¹ Selby's choice of

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Rev. Dick Whittington at Ightham Church for showing me the monument and for providing me with photocopied material. The epitaph and needlework are described in Sir Edward. R. Harrison, *The History and Records of Ightham Church* (Cowley: Church Army Press, 1932), pp. 16-18.

⁴⁹ Selby was supposed to have interpreted correctly the famous letter received by Lord Mounteagle. See Katherine Esdaile, 'Gunpowder Plot in Needlework: Dame Dorothy Selby, "Whose Art Disclos'd the Plot"', *Country Life*, June 1943, pp. 1094-96. Esdaile prints photographs of Selby's monument.

⁵⁰ Another embroidered version of this print survives, held in the Lady Lever Collection, Port Sunlight. Both are discussed in Xanthe Brooke's *Catalogue of Embroideries*, pp. 18-20.

⁵¹ Another extant embroidery by Selby reinforces the protestations of loyalty to the crown. Illustrated by Esdaile (p. 1095), it presents a scene of 'A Session of Parliament in the Presence of King James I' (the

needlework as the vehicle to memorialise her 'pretious name' is significant; the epitaph implies that with 'silken incke' she claimed and was understood to have written her memorial just as effectively as if she had put pen to paper and scripted words.

Literary convention echoes Selby's belief in the capacity of needlework to stand as a memorial. A series of sonnets written by John Taylor the Water Poet (in a volume which had gone into its twelfth edition by the time Dorothy Selby died) commemorate the lives in the works of a number of famous women. Taylor claims, for example, that Elizabeth Dormer's name and honour are preserved, superimposed, in the needlework she left behind: 'longer than her life, her laud shall last, | Workes shewes her worth'. Taylor makes much the same claims for everlasting fame through needlework for Mary Sidney, Katherine of Aragon and Mary Tudor: Mary Sidney 'wrought so well in Needle-worke that she | Nor yet her workes, shall ere forgotten be'; Katharine Parr's works are termed 'her excellent memorialls', and Mary Tudor's needlework will ensure that her 'memory will never be decaid'.⁵²

The monument functions primarily as a way of memorialising Selby's 'pretious name', which is yoked in the epitaph with another name, that of 'Sir William Selby, Knt', of whom she is 'the relict'. The social role of widow is also predicated in the epitaph upon Selby's textile identity, by giving Dorothy Selby another name: she is 'a Dorcas', the biblical exemplar of the needleworking woman from Acts 9. 36-41 who made 'coats and

source engraving for which has not as yet been identified). A glory of rays streams down through James to illuminate the parliament, and angels are pictured holding the canopy of state above James's head. Texts read '[y]ee glorious Angels above singe praise', and 'by this all princes may see god'. 'The Acts of Jonah' are visible in a full-length portrait of Selby, also illustrated by Esdaile (p. 1096). Selby's hand rests upon her painted embroidery.

⁵² John Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, 12th edn (London: Boler, 1640), sigs. A3^v, ll. 3-4; A3^v, ll. 13-14; A3^r, l. 10; A3^r, l. 3.

garments' for widows as a charitable act (vs. 39). The effigy underscores the social role of widow by depicting her clothed in widow's weeds, in a carved version of the biblical episode where the widows stand around on Dorcas's death 'weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made'. The display of needlework and widow's garments claim for Selby Dorcas's virtuous persona, which on a funerary monument is all the more significant inasmuch as Dorcas was raised from the dead by Peter the Apostle (vv. 40-41).

After the spouse's death, broadly speaking, the role of the elite 'relict' became socially problematic and uncomfortable: her inherited means made her financially independent outside the accepted polarities of married or unmarried status. The widow was frequently urged to take a second husband, but even remarriage was seen as a possible source of social complication insofar as the inheritance rights of existing children were concerned.⁵³ This situation, says Elizabeth Honig, gave rise to a 'socially constructed idea of the Good Widow', according to which artificial role, 'the good widow does *not* function as an independent woman but as the remaining element of a combinative marriage which had been defined in terms of the male partner'.⁵⁴ The ideal of the Good Widow, she continues, stresses 'the wife's role as the preserver of her husband's memory', public expression of loyalty and faithfulness to which should be unceasing, and unquenchable.

⁵³ Bess of Hardwick, for example, 'had twice suffered the trauma of family estates being transferred to the Court of Wards, after the deaths of her father and her first young husband,' and 'it is not surprising that the new house and lands were registered in the names of both Bess and her second husband. This was to protect the interests of their children should Sir William die before the eldest son came of age — as indeed happened' (Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 9).

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Honig, 'In Memory: Lady Dacre and Pairing by Hans Eworth', in Gent and Llewellyn, pp. 60-85 (p. 66).

‘Leat the wydowe[s] remembre,’ counselled Juan Louis Vives in his 1529 handbook for women, *A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book called the Instruction of a Christen Woman*, and they will keep the souls of their husbands alive, since ‘the lyvely image of them be imprinted in our hartes wyth often thynking upon them’.⁵⁵ Needlework was considered a particularly appropriate vehicle for the widow to commemorate her husband, because the practice denoted quiet contemplation and because needlework was a visual medium. According to Francis Bacon in 1605, ‘emblem reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible, which strike the memory more’.⁵⁶ One ‘good widow’ who chose to commemorate her husband’s memory with a needleworked emblem was Bess of Hardwick. Her mourning panel to her second husband Sir William Cavendish (fig. 1.10) shows tears falling onto quicklime with the Latin motto ‘*extinctam lachrimae testantur vivere flammam*’ (‘Tears witness that the quenched flame lives’). It is surrounded by a border of conventional mourning emblems: broken mirrors, severed interlaced cords, falling feathers (punning the Italian *penne*, feathers, and the French *peine*, sorrow), a glove cut in two, a snapped chain, three intertwined finger-rings, family symbolism and heraldry, and the embroidered date 1570. The border emblems assert that Bess still actively mourns Cavendish, and the emblem claims that such mourning keeps alive the memory of the ‘quenched flame’ of Cavendish’s life. The convention of the emblematically-asserted role of Good Widow is complicated here by the date: by 1570 Bess had taken a third and then a fourth husband, Sir William St Loe, and George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. The Case Study which follows this chapter will consider in detail Bess’s iconographical programmes, and suggest that the ‘virtuous

⁵⁵ Juan Luis Vives, *A very fruteful and pleasant booke called the Instruction of a christen woman*, trans. by R. Hyrde (London: Powell, 1557), p. Ll iv^r, cited in Honig, pp. 68-69. The relationship between active and contemplative practice will be considered in greater depth below. Vives’ remained a popular conduct manual throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean period.

⁵⁶ [Sir Francis] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by William Aldis Wright, 5th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), II.15.3.



Fig. 1.10 Bess of Hardwick: Cavendish hanging central panel showing emblem of tears falling on quicklime with conventional mourning symbols in borders. 1570 (Hardwick Hall)

widow' was one major strand in the creation of her public persona, of which the Cavendish panel is the clearest statement.

The testamentary transmission of needlework items traces a map of kinship and other ties. Like precious jewellery, needlework is saved in the family, and although much has been lost or worn out, many pieces are still extant, bearing witness to the care with which they have been conserved. Needlework is valued as the fruit of personal labour (Lady Anne Drury bequeathed 'a cloth bed' in 1621 which was carefully stipulated to have been 'of my own working'), or as physical evidence of strongly felt affective bonds between women (Anne Clifford's choice of words eloquently illustrates the force of generational love in her bequest to her 'deare daughter' of 'seaven or eight old truncks and all that is within them, being for the most part old things that were my deare and blessed mother's, which truncks commonly stand in my owne chamber or the next unto it').⁵⁷ The testament of Anne Clifford's 'deare and blessed mother', Margaret Clifford, Countess Dowager of Cumberland, records her kinships and friendships in her detailed textile bequests: 'a satton canopye imbrodered, with the stoole belonging to it' to 'my neece, the Countesse of Bedford'; 'to my nephewe, my Lord Francis Russell [...] and to his lady [...] two pieces of cloth of gould embrodered with great pearle and seed pearle'; to the wife of Sir Philip Tirwhitt, 'my gould mantle'; 'to my cozen, Eliz. Apsley, a petticote of clothe of silver embrodered with hopps'; 'to the wife of 'my cozen Hall [...] a velvet gown'; 'to the wife of Sir Edward Yorke 'a curtell of cloth of gould'. Two of her servants were also given textile items to remember her by: a Mrs Wetherington received 'a silke grogram gowne' and a Mr Dawson 'two peices of

⁵⁷ Drury's will is cited, without further reference, in Therle Hughes, *English Domestic Needlework: 1660-1860* (London: Lutterworth, 1961), p. 121; 'Summary of the Will of Lady Anne Clifford', dated 1 May 1674, in Williamson, p. 468. Jones and Stallybrass also read Clifford's bequest as an index of social relationship (p. 203).

hanginge of Deborah'.⁵⁸ The testamentary transmission of significant embroidered items was not confined to women, however: Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, for example, left 'the Suite of new dressed hanginges which were my Lord Berkeleys to the nowe Lord Berkeley, my ward'.⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that the hangings he gave had thus passed down at least through three generations, had been conserved and repaired carefully, and were regarded as a family heirloom.

Howard's bequest of the hangings signals the part played by needlework in the transmission of genealogy. The 1564 Lewkenor table carpet in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art displays the arms of Sir Roger Lewkenor and his wife Elizabeth Messent in a shield centrally placed in the composition, 'enclosed by a wreath, with boy supporters who stand on a mound on which are cowslips, wild strawberries, heartsease, and other flowers, against a dark background almost covered by a less natural spray of flowers, like lilies, roses and honeysuckles', and a border, 'composed of bunches of flowers and fruit, amongst which are arranged fourteen armorials of the family alliances' (fig. 1.11).⁶⁰ This type, with its armorial bearings, resembles many extant carpets, but the particular significance of the Lewkenor carpet as a record of family genealogy is proved by a memorandum of 1662 in the handwriting of Sir John Lewkenor:

Remember to keep safe the carpet of arms, now aged about 100 years,

⁵⁸ 'Abridgment [sic] of the Will of Margaret, Countess Dowager of Cumberland', dated 27 April, 1616, in Williamson, pp. 458-59.

⁵⁹ Evelyn Philip Shirley, 'An Inventory of the Effects of Henry Howard, K.G., Earl of Northampton, taken on his death in 1614, with a Transcript of his Will [...]', *Archaeologia*, 42 (1869), 347-378 (p. 376). Subsequent references are given in the text. George Lord Berkeley was the great nephew of Henry Howard (Howard's sister Catherine had married George Berkeley's grandfather Henry Lord Berkeley. George's father Thomas had died before his own father). The wardship also passed on into the family: to Richard and Thomas Spencer, George's other great-uncles.

⁶⁰ W. G. Thomson, *Tapestry Weaving in England From the Earliest Times to the End of the XVIIIth Century* (London: Batsford, [1915]), p. 52, cited in M. J. Mayorcas, *English Needlework Carpets: 16th to 19th Centuries* (Leigh-on-Sea: Lewis, 1963), p. 28.

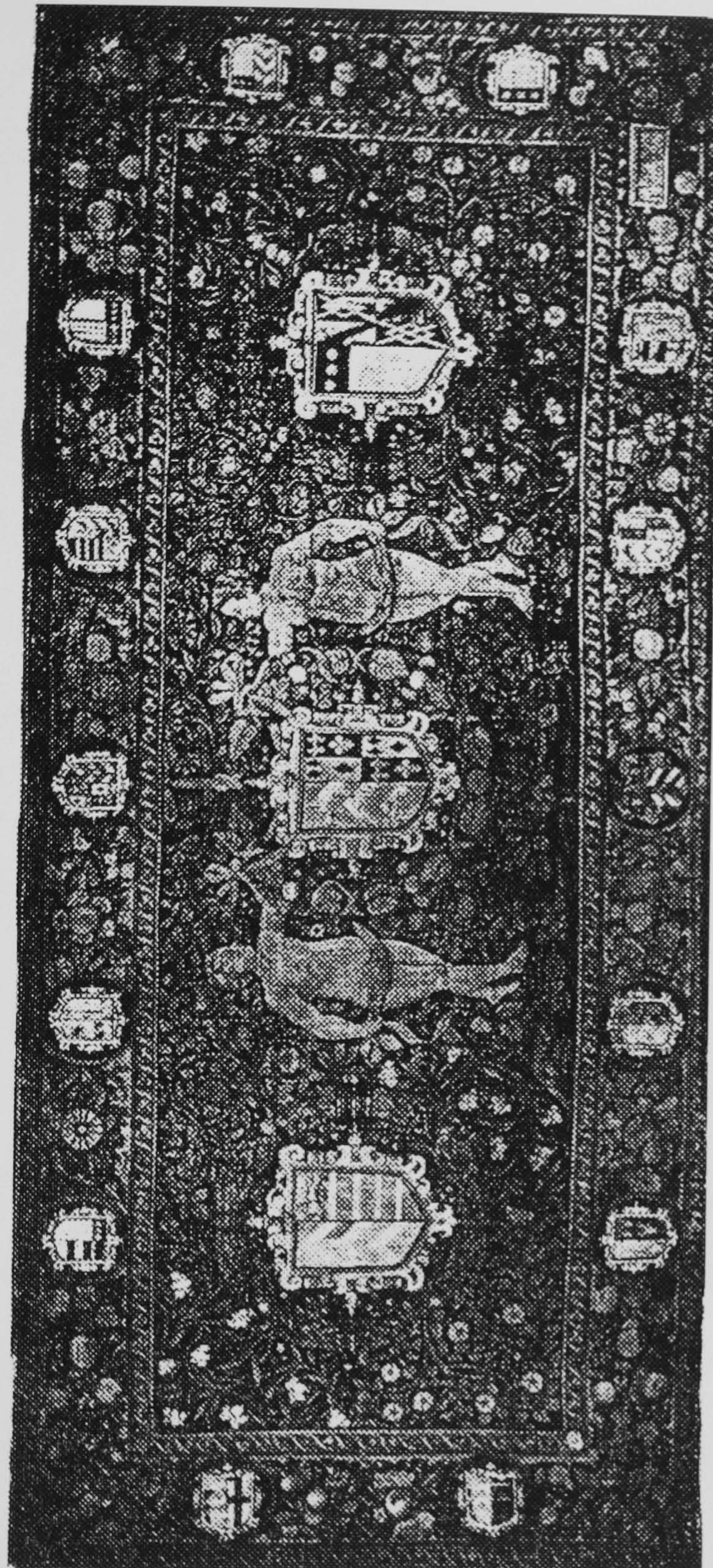


Fig. 1.11 The Lewkenor Table Carpet, dated 1564 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

which in the failure of the older house totalie consuming itself by daughters and heires and passing into other names, was sent hither by Constance Glemham of Trotton, who was one of those heires, for record to you younger house and whole name.⁶¹

Just as Selby's needlework panels are 'Records of Gold' that narrate biblical and political histories and memorialise her 'pretious name', the Lewkenor table carpet is a visual 'record' of a family history and lost name. Although the 'failure' of the older house is a consequence of the generation or survival of daughters only, the same daughters are the designated makers or commissioners of the needleworked record, and send it on to the 'younger house'. Their needlework becomes the repository of a century of genealogy, in place of the sons who would bear their family name down the generations.

Although in this case the carpet became an unusually important record because of the 'failure of the older house' and name, in some bequests transmission of genealogy down the female line is implied, such as Bess of Hardwick's bequest to her daughter Mary of the 60-year-old pearl-covered bed of her 1547 marriage to Mary's father Sir William Cavendish. The bequest was made in a codicil to Bess's will of 1601, which had instructed that her textiles in their entirety should 'contynewe' at her 'sayed several houses'. The codicil separated the marriage bed from the rest of the collection, and made special provision for it to take the memory of the marriage it commemorated and the children generated by that marriage to her daughter Mary Cavendish Talbot's home.

Aristocratic women's bequests articulate affective and other bonds between women

⁶¹ Cited, without further reference, in Mayorcas, p. 28.

through needlework. This appears also to be borne out in other areas of women's social life. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, for example, described the close relationship between her sisters as being forged through their [needle]work, amongst other things. Although some were married, 'yet most of them lived with my mother, especially when she was at her country-house' in Caroline England:

As for the pastimes of my sisters when they were in the country, it was to reade, work, walk and discourse with one another [...]. They did seldom make Visits, nor never went abroad with Strangers in their Company, but onely themselves, in a Flock together agreeing so well, that there seemed but one Minde amongst them.⁶²

Cavendish's record of actual practice echoes Shakespeare's Helena and Hermia, who were imagined as 'two artificial gods' who had

with our needles created both one flower
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds
Had been incorporate. So we grew together
Like to a double cherry.⁶³

The experience of Cavendish's sisters, embroidering, reading, and walking 'in a Flock together' with 'but one Minde' must have been a familiar one for Shakespeare to use the image of needleworking women to trope social cohesion.

During extended periods of loneliness and desperation throughout her married life, Anne Clifford strengthened relationships with her female friends and connections through needlework. This activity seems to have been especially fervent during periods

⁶² Margaret Cavendish, 'A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life', in *The Lives of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, and of his Wife, Margaret Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. by Mark Antony Lower (London: Smith, 1872), pp. 275, 274, 276-77.

⁶³ *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III.2.203.

like 1616 when, as the young Countess of Dorset, she was virtually imprisoned at Knole House by her husband Richard Sackville, who was at that time pressurising her relentlessly to 'pass my right of the lands in Westmorland to him & my Child'.⁶⁴ Many of her friends and acquaintances had taken against her: she reports that 'being condemned by most folks because I would not consent to the Agreement' made her feel 'like an owl in the Desert' (p. 48). Signs of solidarity from women – not even visits, but messages – were great confidence boosters: Lady [Bridget] Willoughby sent a man to see her in early May 1616, which Clifford took as 'a great argument of her love being in the midst of all my misery' (p. 46).⁶⁵ Dorothy Selby was a neighbour and particular friend who frequently visited during Clifford's time at Knole and who continued to support her in resisting her husband and his faction. Clifford sought comfort and found something to do in her needlework; 'it being my chief help to pass the time away to work', making a series of Irish stitch cushions, first mentioned when one was finished on 15 June 1616 (p. 53). These cushions took up a great deal of Clifford's time: 'many wearisome days besides' are described as being wholly or partially spent 'working', and in October of the same year she even recorded 'this month I spent in working & Reading' (pp. 86; 101). This was not necessarily work done alone, though: sometimes she worked whilst being read to, either by her husband (28 August 1616), or one of the household (27 February 1617), or as a joint activity with one of her women (15 March 1617), or with a friend or relative (12 November 1616). The work was portable and was an activity that she practised in company when visiting (12 November 1616). Neither

⁶⁴ *The Diary of Anne Clifford 1616-1619: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Katherine O. Acheson (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995), p. 53. Subsequent references to Anne Clifford's Diary are to this edition, and are given in the text.

⁶⁵ Lady Bridget Willoughby was the heir of Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton Hall and Elizabeth Littleton. She married Percivall in 1580, at which time she is believed to have been about fourteen years old. Percivall, of Bore Place in Kent, inherited Wollaton Hall on Francis's death in 1596. For the needlework associated with Bridget Willoughby see below p. 77. For the sad experiences of her mother, see above, pp. 52-54.

was the work necessarily for the use of her household: Clifford mentions beginning a new Irish stitch cushion, 'not one of those for L^{dy} Rich but finer Canvas' (22 March 1617), which suggests a series of gifts or perhaps a commission (p. 75).⁶⁶ A reference to finishing a 'sheet of my Lady Sussex her work that is for the Palace' suggests another commission, or perhaps a new stitch or pattern that had been passed on to her by Lady Sussex for her own use (p. 74n).⁶⁷ Clifford's work, although frequently solitary and associated with miserable attempts to fend off boredom, was also often associated with social intercourse and also (particularly in the case of the cushions associated with Lady Rich and the 'sheet of Lady Sussex's work') with a close circle of court connections with whom Clifford will in Chapter Three be seen working through needlework to secure royal favour and protection.

The traces of needlework practice that survive suggest that needlework served elite Elizabethan and Jacobean women as a vehicle for constructing social relations. This was particularly the case with needlework gifts. As a young girl in the 1620s and 30s Mary Boyle, later Lady Rich, Countess of Warwick, was just one of the young women, educated away from her own family and brought up in the households of other aristocrats until the age of seven, who sent her parents needlework gifts of her own making. Her father recorded her gifts to him which included a night cap one year, a handkerchief the next, 'garters and roses' and 'a needlework purse of her own making' (an example of a contemporary cap for a man embroidered with roses and other flowers is shown in fig. 1.12).⁶⁸ In some ways this was a dutiful and practical demonstration of

⁶⁶ Lady Rich was Frances Hatton, daughter of Sir William and Elizabeth Gawdy. She married Sir Robert Rich, later 2nd Earl of Warwick.

⁶⁷ The Knole manuscript has 'Pallet' for 'Palace'. See textual note, Acheson, p. 126. Lady Sussex was Bridget Morison (d. 1623). She married Robert Radcliffe, 5th Earl of Sussex.

⁶⁸ Cited in Charlotte Fell Smith, *Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (1625-1678): Her Family and Friends* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901, p. 47.



Fig. 1.12 Nightcap embroidered with daffodils, roses, pansies, acorns etc. Silk and silver thread, silver spangles and bobbin thread, early 17th c (Burrell Collection, Glasgow)



Fig. 1.13 Elizabeth I: needlework bookcover for *The Miroir; or Glasse of the Synnefull Soul*. Filigree of gold and silver wire on blue corded silk, 1544 (Bodleian Library)

the education she was being given, in much the same fashion as a New Year's gift from Elizabeth I to her stepmother Katherine Parr almost a century earlier in 1544, of her own translation of *The Miroir or Glasse of the Synnefull Soul*, bound in a needlework cover (fig. 1.13).⁶⁹ According to Rozsika Parker, in its 'combination of scholarship and skilled embroidery, [this gift] represented the renaissance education received by the most privileged women at the time'.⁷⁰ But Lisa M. Klein has argued persuasively that Elizabeth's gifts were also carefully calculated to create or strengthen family connections for a precise purpose.⁷¹ Two other needlework gifts were a volume of Katherine Parr's *Prayers and Meditations* bound with a needleworked cover to her father Henry VIII in 1545, and a manuscript to Katherine Parr with a cover very similar in design to the one for *Prayers and Meditations*.⁷² Klein reads the iconography of these gifts, combining monograms, true lovers' knots and pansies as 'mending or maintaining the relationship with her father', by 'gently manipulating the social hierarchies within which she was embedded' and positioning herself 'in a female community within Henry's court' (pp. 482-83). Mary Rich's gifts almost a century later do the same kind of social work, and negotiate the relationship with her father, especially at times of tension or stress. When her father was furious with her for not agreeing to the match he had arranged for her with James Hamilton in 1639-40 ('my aversion for him was extraordinary, though I could give my father no satisfactory account why it was so'),⁷³ she sent him no less than four night caps as a New Year's gift.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Bodleian Library MS Cherry 36.

⁷⁰ Rozsika Parker, p. 73.

⁷¹ Elizabeth's three embroidered covers have been treated in detail by Lisa Klein, pp. 476-84. Klein is careful to note that there is no evidence to prove the cover was stitched by Elizabeth herself.

⁷² Henry's gift is in the British Library, Royal MS 7 D.x. Katherine Parr's second gift is in the Scottish Record Office, and cited by Klein, p. 477n.

⁷³ Cited, unattributed, in Smith, *Mary Rich*, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Mary Rich*, p. 67. The gift appears to have had no effect on the Earl, and Boyle 'continued in great disgrace for her stubborn conduct. Her riding horse was given away, and at length, as an extreme

Needlework was also used to mediate affective relationships with possible or actual partners. Lady Bridget Willoughby (fig. 1.14) and her cousin and husband Percivall seemed to have worked up an iconic shorthand for their mutual affection, which could be conveyed using pen and ink by him and silk and fabric by her. In a letter to Bridget written from abroad by Percivall and transcribed undated by their great-grand-daughter the historian Lady Cassandra Willoughby-Bryges, Percivall assures Bridget that ‘I can’t make any greater place for thee in my heart then I have done [...] and so, sweet soul, my love and life is only thine’.⁷⁵ He signs off the letter with a ‘sketch of heart transfixed with darts’. Although the original letter is no longer extant, the darted heart image has strong resonances in Bridget’s surviving needlework: a man’s embroidered shirt has a heart stuck round the edges like a hedgehog with dart-like stitches, and an unusual cover from the early seventeenth century is richly embroidered with motifs which include the more conventional ‘flaming’ heart. A coif and forehead cloth dating from around 1600 is decorated with a pattern worked in gold threads enclosing heart motifs.⁷⁶

measure, her money allowance was stopped’ (p. 67). Boyle married Charles Rich, later 4th Earl of Warwick, without her parents’ permission aged 15 on 20 July 1641, but soon afterwards was reconciled to her father (p. 77). The political aspects of Elizabethan and Jacobean gifts of needlework are considered at length in Chapter Three below.

⁷⁵ ‘An Account of the Willoughby’s’, (p. 559).

⁷⁶ The collection of Willoughby embroidery dating from the time of Elizabeth Littleton and Bridget Willoughby is on loan to the Nottingham Museum of Costume and Textiles. The collection was catalogued by John Nevinson, as ‘The Lord Middleton Collection of Costume and Textiles lent to the Castle Museum, Nottingham, and now housed in the Museum of Costume and Textiles, Nottingham’ (unpublished catalogue notes c. 1937 with additional notes by J. W. Farrell, c. 1972). Material from this catalogue has been incorporated into an article in two parts by John L. Nevinson, ‘Unrecorded Types of Embroidery in the Collection of Lord Middleton’, *Connoisseur*, 103 (1939), 16-20, and ‘English Embroidered Costume in the Collection of Lord Middleton’, *Connoisseur*, 103 (1939), 136-41. Another article treating the collection is Zillah Halls’s ‘The Middleton Collection’, in two parts, *Embroidery*, 14 (1963), 11-14; 43-45. I am grateful to J. W. Farrell, curator of the Nottingham Museum of Costume and Textiles, for showing me around the Middleton collection and furnishing me with a copy of Nevinson’s unpublished notes. The darted heart embroidered motif was used by Mary Wroth in *Urania* as the impresa of Polarchos, ‘son to the King of Cipros’ (Mary Wroth, *The First Part of the Countesse of Mountgomerie Urania*, ed. by Josephine A. Roberts, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 140; Renaissance English Text Society, 17 (Binghampton, NY: Renaissance English Text Society, 1995), p. 237). His twenty attendants are clothed in livery of ‘seagreene velvet, embroderd with crimson silke, in the fashion of hearts, stroke through with darts’. The impresa is the sign that Polarchos is ‘subject by love to the Lady of Rhodes’.



Fig. 1. 14 Artist unknown: Lady Bridget Willoughby. c.1610 (Lord Middleton)

The culture of embroidered love tokens (which in the lower ‘estates’ had almost legal binding value as a marriage contract) was harnessed in literature, as seen earlier in Cecropia’s interpretation of Pamela’s purse as work ‘dedicated’ to a loved one, ‘a treasure itself, worthy to be pursed up in the purse of his own heart.’⁷⁷ Edmund Spenser used his fiancée’s ‘drawn work’ as the basis for a conceit which he develops in sonnet LXXI:

I ioy to see how in your drawn work,
Your selfe vnto the Bee ye doe compare;
And me vnto the Spyder.⁷⁸

The conceit of the courtly lover made captive by love that Cecropia’s rhetoric tried unsuccessfully to map onto Sidney’s Pamela is also reworked by Spenser. He employs the idea of the spider entrapping the insect in its web to illustrate, unusually, an insidious *male* practice: he ‘doth lurke, | in close awayt’ to catch her in a ‘cunning snare’ of thraldom and ‘streight bands’ (ll. 2-3, 4, 5, 6). In time, he says, she will learn to love her captivity, and the simile he chooses to illustrate this transformation is her needlework:

as your worke is wouen all aboue,
with woodbynd flowers and fragrant Eglantine,
so sweet your prison you in time shall proue’ (ll. 9-11).

It is the work itself, and not just the almost herbal remedy of its subject content, which sweetens and transforms the unpleasant experience into one of ‘eternall peace’ (l. 13).

⁷⁷ For the value of love tokens in marriage contracts, see Diana O’Hara, ‘The Language of Tokens and the Making of Marriage’, *Rural History* 3 (1992), 1-40. For the function of embroidered purses in sixteenth and seventeenth century marriages and for Pamela’s purse, see pp. 56-57 above.

⁷⁸ (ll. 1-3). *The Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by Alexander Grosart, 9 vols (London and Aylesbury: [n.pub.], 1882).

III: Valuing Needlework: Embroidering Wealth

I have argued that needlework gifts and bequests trace a map of affective relations. One reason why needlework in particular was chosen for such a purpose was because it was such valuable property. Whilst Bess of Hardwick had fought to retain the disputed Virtues hangings because they fitted into the iconographical programmes with which she figured forth persona and personage, the Earl of Shrewsbury had sued in the first place because the textiles were inherently valuable.

An exploration of the economic value of needlework locks into the social contexts surveyed above. Luxury textiles such as tapestries, embroidered furnishings and clothes made from costly imported fabrics were part of the socio-political practice of renaissance aristocratic conspicuous display, signalling absolute superiority over the vast majority of the population during a period when the cost of labour was a fraction of the cost of the materials used. Thirteen years after Bess of Hardwick the Countess of Shrewsbury paid professional embroiderer Thomas Lane 40 shillings for two months' work ('the tyme he wroughte of the bed and hangings') in 1599, the Countess of Salisbury was reputed to have spent £14,000 on 'hangings of white satin embroidered with silver and pearls' for a lying-in bed ordered for the birth of her daughter in 1612.⁷⁹ It is interesting to note, at this point, the crucial involvement of the women as architects and producers of the artifice of aristocratic conspicuous display, the opening up of their participation in the non-verbal discourses of wealth and power.

⁷⁹ Chatsworth House, Hardwick MS 8, fol. 79^v, cited in Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 43; Therle Hughes, p. 120. Wingfield-Digby records that the Kytson family of Hengrave Hall paid embroiderers around 7-8d per day in 1572, 2d more than tapestry menders at the same time (pp. 30-1. His source is Gage, p. 191). Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, died in 1612, leaving debts of £30,000. Since a large portion of his estate had to be sold to cover this debt, it is not clear how his daughter-in-law the new Countess of Salisbury was in a position to be able to afford the kind of conspicuous expenditure indicated by Hughes.

The Elizabethan and Jacobean elite were possessed of an immense amount of superfluous wealth. In this pre-industrialised period, 'the icing on the cake was getting thicker, before the cake itself was getting very much bigger'.⁸⁰ This wealth functioned as a powerful engine of change, as de Grazia has remarked:

Material life at the broad base of society remained essentially the same. Food, drink, houses, clothes and fashions remained for the masses virtually unchanged for the simple reason that sufficiency made do with what it had. Only at the narrow top where superfluity could afford change was there fluctuation. [...] Superfluity sought out dynamic variety and change.⁸¹

Superfluity of wealth — or at least the social imperative which required conspicuous consumption on a massive scale — contributed to the vast proliferation of needlework objects used to furnish aristocratic houses of the time.

Jane Stevenson has argued that one of the central purposes of elite textiles was to 'preserve the reputation and status of the English in an international context'.⁸² Foreign ambassadors, dignitaries and visitors to the court commented upon the richness and quality of the fabrics used for dress and furnishings, and not only at court. 'Certes,' wrote the chronologist William Harrison in 1577, 'in noblemen's houses it is not rare to see abundance of arras, rich hangings of tapestry [...] whereby the value of this and the rest of their stuff doth grow to be almost inestimable', and he remarked that in the 'tapestry and silk hangings' and 'tables with carpets and fine napery', 'the wealth of our

⁸⁰ N. B. Harte, 'State Control of Dress and Social change in Pre-Industrial England', in D. C. Coleman and A. H. John, eds., *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays presented to F. J. Fisher* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp. 132-65, p. 134.

⁸¹ De Grazia, 'The Ideology of Superfluous Things', pp. 32-33

⁸² Stevenson, p. 19.

country [...] doth infinitely appear'.⁸³ Elyot, often so critical of luxury embroidered fabrics, had felt that on occasion the political power of such visual signifiers was worth the cost, and that 'sumptuous expenses' may be suffered 'where there is a great assembly of strangers, for then some time it is expedient that a nobleman in his apparel do advaunt himself to be both riche and honourable'.⁸⁴ One such occasion was undoubtedly the wedding of James's daughter Elizabeth to Count Frederick, Elector Palatine on 14 February 1613. John Chamberlain, in a letter to Alice Carleton, remarked particularly on the 'bravery' of those in the procession: 'you may conceive the rest by one or two. The lady Wooton had a gown that cost fifty pound a yard the embroidering [...] and the Lord Montague (that hath paid reasonably well for recusancy), bestowed fifteen hundred pound in apparel for his two daughters.'⁸⁵ We have a pictorial record of one guest at the wedding in a portrait of Anne Clifford's first husband, Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset (fig. 1.15). An observer reported at the time that Sackville 'dazzled the eyes of all who saw', and indeed, the richly embroidered clothes are described in an inventory of his clothing: the 'cloake of uncut velvett blacke laced with seaven embroadered laces of gold and black silke [...] and lyned with shagg of black silver and gold' and 'the doublett of Cloth of silver embroadered all over in slips of sattin black and gold'.⁸⁶ The persona embodied by the

⁸³ William Harrison, *The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life*, ed. by Georges Edelen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 200. In 1595 Württemberg ambassador Breuning von Buchenbach commented that 'at no other court have I seen such splendour and such fine clothes' (Victor von Klarwill, *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners: Being a Series of Letters from the Archives of the Hapsburg Family*, trans. by T. H. Nash (London: Lane, 1928), p. 376, cited in Stevenson, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, ed. by S. E. Lehmborg (London and New York: Dent, 1962), II. 3, p. 103.

⁸⁵ Letter dated 18 February 1613, *The Chamberlain Letters: A Selection of the Letters of John Chamberlain Concerning Life in England from 1597-1626*, ed. by Elizabeth McClure Thomson (New York: Putnam, 1965), p. 74.

⁸⁶ Tabitha Barber, notes on portrait of 'Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset', attr. Larkin, in *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, ed. by Karen Hearn ([London]: Tate Publishing, 1995), p. 199.



Fig. 1.15 Attr. Wiliam Larkin: Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset. Oil on canvas, 1613 (English Heritage)

portrait and clothes is that of a ‘personage’ – a supremely wealthy peer in attendance at royal weddings, perfectly turned out in the very latest fashions.

Chamberlain remarked upon the wedding procession as an international statement of personal and national wealth, but was not uncritical; the display was, he felt, ‘excessive’, and had deleterious effects on the national purse. ‘This extreme of costs and riches’, he said, ‘makes us all poor’.⁸⁷ Others were with him in feeling that the international credibility established in the display of luxury imported textiles was dearly bought and that England’s monetary reserves were being depleted, spent abroad on ‘vain, superfluous unnecessary things’, including ‘rich Stuffles, which serve more for pompe and show, than for need and use’.⁸⁸ Camden, in his 1615 history of Elizabeth’s reign, claimed that the ruinous fashion for luxury textiles not only made the country poor, but was the root cause for a breakdown in law and order:

In these days, a wondrous Excess in Apparel had spread itself all over *England*. [...] Men [...] jetted up and down in their Silks glittering with Gold and Silver, either embroider’d or laced. The Queen observing that to maintain this Excess, a great quantity of Money was carry’d yearly out of the Land, to buy Silks, and other outlandish Wares, to the impoverishing of the Commonwealth; and that many of the Nobility, who might be of great Service to the Commonwealth, and others that they might seem of noble Extraction, did, to their undoing, not only waste their Estates, but also run so far into Debt, that of necessity they came into Danger of the Law thereby; and attempted to raise Troubles

⁸⁷ Sackville’s appearance in the portrait, notes Barber, is consistent with his reputation for extravagant luxury beyond his means: he was forced to mortgage Knole to support his prodigious expenditure, and Clarendon described him as a ‘licentious spendthrift’ (*Dynasties*, p. 198. Clarendon is cited, without further reference, on the same page).

⁸⁸ Lewes Roberts, *The Treasure of Traffike; or, a Discourse of Forraigne Trade* [...] (1641), in *A Selection of Early English Tracts on Commerce*, ed. by John Ramsay MacCulloch (London: Political Economy Club, 1856), p. 76, cited in Fumerton, p. 174. The tracts contained in this volume are all in favour of commercial traffic and trade, and refute the objections raised by others, of which this citation from Roberts is an example.

and Commotions.⁸⁹

Sumptuary legislation, however unsuccessful, sought not only to preserve the visible social hierarchy, but also, in part, to curb the tendency to import foreign 'outlandish' textiles at the expense of British woollen cloth.⁹⁰

Certain sectors of the domestic economy profited, however, from the fashion for embroidered items. Embroidery was institutionalised in 1552 with the re-incorporation of the Broderers' Guild, reflecting the inclusion of embroiderers in the new powerbase and the demand for embroidered fabrics from the newly affluent.⁹¹ The silkwomen who produced professionally-embroidered items decorated with silk and metal thread both imported and dealt in metal thread and raw silk, and produced the thread and *passementerie* which fetched such astoundingly high prices on the market. In 1607 Bess of Hardwick spent £251 6s 8d on the thread and *passementerie* for bed furnishings for her daughter. An example of the *passementerie* extant at Hardwick is shown in fig. 1.16.⁹² Lucy Harrington Russell, Countess of Bedford attempted to tap this lucrative source of income. She

induced the capitalist Burlamacchi to bring over to England a Frenchwoman, Madame Turatta, who undertook to teach the manufacture of gold and silver thread. From two of the persons who obtained the

⁸⁹ William Camden, *The History or Annals of England, during the Whole Life and Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1615), in John Milton and others, *A Complete History of England: With the Lives of all the Kings and Queens thereof*, 3 vols (London: Aymer et al., 1796), II, p. 452.

⁹⁰ On sumptuary law see Baldwin; and Harte.

⁹¹ For the Broderer's Company see Christopher Holford, *A Chat about the Broderers: By an Old Boy and Past Master* (London: Allen, 1910).

⁹² Parker, p. 68; Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 31. The total cost of the bed was £490 10s ½d, of which £85 8s 6d was for 'two great and two small curtains and a headpiece of velvet embroidered with metal thread, strip and purl', and £153 14s 10½d was for an 'embroidered canopy and valance'. The bill for *passementerie* (more than half the total cost) consisted of '190 yards of silver braid, various depths of silver and crimson fringe, silver buttons and loops, crimson ribbon and cord, sewing silk and silk lining fabric'. The cost of the curtains was relatively low because 'the owter pte' was 'plaine & unwrought'. Perhaps the braid, fringe, ribbon and silk were used to embroider the surface of the curtains (Lambeth MSS 702, fol. 69; 700, fol. 61; 694, fol. 132).

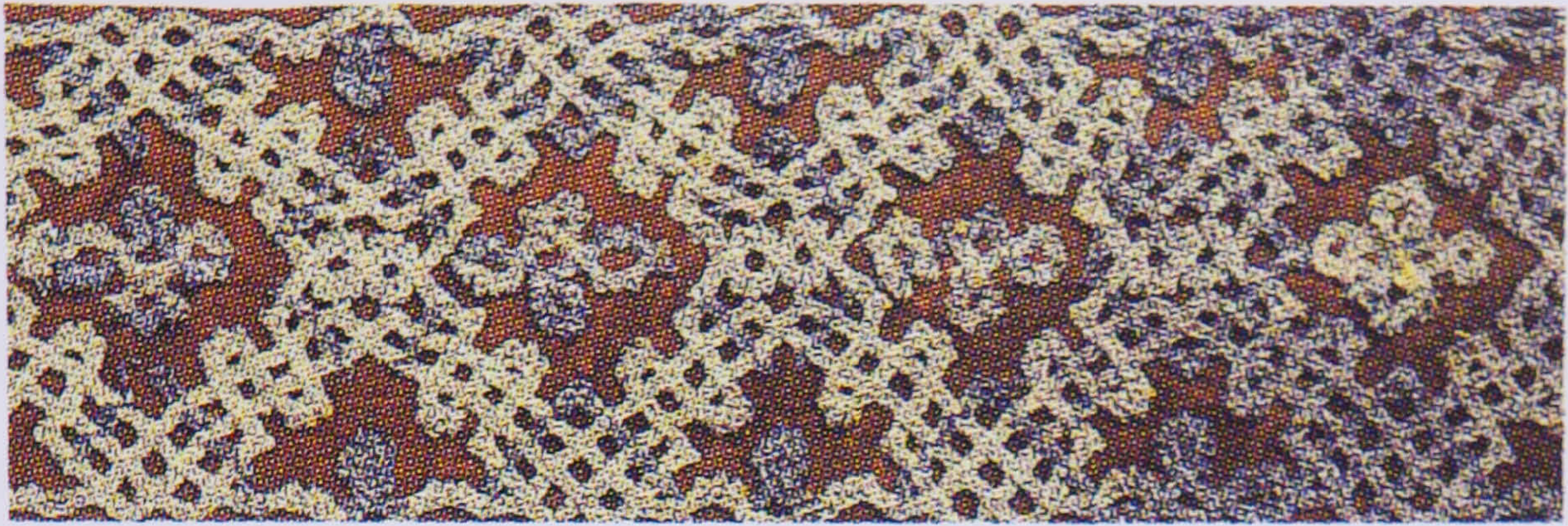


Fig. 1.16 Passementerie: gold and silver bobbin lace, mid-16th c (Hardwick Hall)



Fig. 1.17 Detail of Fig. 1.6 Embroidered ruff with 'antiquities': ragged staves and spotted serpents in black and white silk

patent through her influence, the Countess received £500 as a reward.⁹³

The idea was a good one, if fashion was any guide: Puritan moralist Philip Stubbes spoke out in his 1583 *Anatomie of Abuses* against the popularity of ruffs ‘either clogged with gold, silver or silk lace of stately price, wrought all ouer with nedle woorke, speckled and sparkled heer & there with the sunne, the moone, the starres, and many other antiquities straunge to beholde’ (fig. 1.17), and portraits throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods show the extensive use of gold and silver thread.⁹⁴

Such enormous expenditure on ostentatious display involved the Elizabethan and Jacobean elite in an ethical difficulty: the equation between *luxus* and lechery. John Sekora, in his extensive study of *Luxury in Western Thought*, traces the sequence of cultural meanings associated with the term.⁹⁵ According to Sekora’s analysis, the Greeks regarded luxury ‘as a retreat from order, a violation of harmony, and the introduction of chaos into the cosmos, preventing the individual and the community from realising their natural ends’. Plato warned against luxurious possession and display leading directly to conflict: our neighbours will covet our lands ‘if, like ourselves, they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth. And so we shall go to war, Glaucon. Shall we not?’⁹⁶ By the time of the Roman moralists, Sekora says, the Ciceronian understanding was that the

⁹³ P. Thompson, ‘John Donne and the Countess of Bedford’, *MLR*, 44 (1949), 329-40 (p. 338). The venture was not a success. Whilst the Goldsmiths ‘urged a prior claim to the manufacture’, the proportions of silk and bullion were ‘sophisticated’, yellow silk substituted for the gold thread, and by the end of the seventeenth century the proportions of metal to silk had been standardised. See Hughes, Chapter 4, for details of the metal thread industry.

⁹⁴ Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses in England in Shakespeare's Youth, A.D. 1583: Part 1*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall (London: Trübner, 1877-9), p. 61.

⁹⁵ John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Subsequent references are given in the text.

⁹⁶ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 2. 373c, cited in Sekora, p. 31.

luxus of city sophisticates was the first sin in a conventional causative spiral which progressively destroyed civilised society: 'the city creates luxury, from which avarice inevitably springs, while from avarice audacity breaks forth, the source of all crimes and misdeeds'.⁹⁷

The early Christian theologians achieved a philosophical fusion of *luxus* with *luxuria*, and branded *luxuria* 'the seed of all vices of the will and the flesh'. It is referred to in lists of cardinal sins as the ultimate sin, the culmination of all others:

The lists also often switch the places of luxury and pride. When luxury is put first, pride is last and vice versa, suggesting a dread circularity of luxury evolving into pride and pride manifesting itself as luxury. And while it is usually identified with physical lust, it is often used by learned writers to stand for lust in figurative senses. Thus they often associate *luxuria* with lust for revenge, lust for worldly goods belonging to others, and lust to retain material possessions. In such instances the sin of luxury encompasses wrath, envy, avarice and pride, as well as lechery (p. 44).

According to Aquinas, luxury is 'the penchant for needless, temporal things' and 'leads to a general dissolution of personality' (pp. 46, 47). Both terms came inevitably to be associated with women: Tertullian had analysed 'this vice of women' in *De cultu feminarum*, in which *luxuria* is 'the source of all corruption and effeminacy', and by the Middle Ages, luxury was understood to assail the soul in three forms, in the cause of the Primal Fall, in the fundamental carnality that unites the world, and in the most formidable of the mortal sins (pp. 40-41). These three aspects of the vice were formulated iconographically in turn as feminine personifications: Eve, Worldly Temptation and Dame Luxury, and throughout the early modern period luxury

⁹⁷ Cicero, *The Speeches: Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: Heinemann,

continued to be personified as feminine and identified as a female sin (pp. 43, 44-45).

The feminine connection with this particular sin combined with the conspicuous nature of embroidered fabrics are perhaps reasons why needlework objects were implicated in this debate from the beginnings of western philosophy: in Plato's list of objects accumulated beyond the reasonable dictates of necessity are included those embellished by the 'arts of the painter and the embroiderer'.⁹⁸ In *The Faerie Queene* embroidery is employed as a signifier for the sins associated with luxury: Radigund the Amazon wears 'an embrodered belt of mickell pride' (v.5.3.5), and Desire is portrayed in the Masque in the House of Busirane with 'an embrodered Bonet' sitting awry on his head (III.12.9.6). The link between lechery, luxury and needlework was highly developed by the time Stubbes spoke out at length against the iniquity of luxurious display, a 'cursed Anatomy' drawn 'out of the deceitfull forge of their own braines [...] to their owne destruction in the end, except the[y] repent'.⁹⁹ He cited needlework and embroidery as signs of iniquitous luxury, remarking, for example, on the quantity of decoration that had doubled the price of cloaks with the 'store of workmanship bestowed vppon them' and the 'shame'ful practice of wearing boot-hose

wrought all ouer, from the gartering place vpward, with nedleworke, clogged with silk of all colors, with birds, foules, beasts and antiques purtrayed all ouer in comlie sort, yea and of late, imbroydered with Golde and Siluer very costly. So that I haue knowen the very nedle work of some one payre of these bootehose to stand, some in iiij pound, vi. pound, and some in x. pound a peece.¹⁰⁰

Boothose of the kind abominated by Stubbes are visible, 'imbroydered with Golde and

1930), 27.75, p. 189, cited in Sekora, p. 35.

⁹⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 2. 372c, cited in Sekora, p. 30.

⁹⁹ Stubbes, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ Stubbes, p. 61.

Siluer very costly', in the portrait of Richard Sackville (fig. 1.15). Stubbes objected to embroidery on the grounds of its decorative content, but also on the grounds of the sheer cost of the luxurious silks and the gold and silver thread used to work it.

Against the powerful arguments against conspicuous display of luxury goods ran an equally powerful counter-argument, with its roots in Aristotelian philosophy, that those of noble birth not only had a right to wealth, but that wealth was the sign of their nobility. The right to govern, and the ability to govern virtuously was conferred upon them by virtue of their noble birth, conspicuous wealth and superior intellect.¹⁰¹

Sumptuary legislation sought unsuccessfully to restrict the wearing of luxury fabrics to the upper echelons of society, who deserved such ornament, because 'God ordained a diversity or pre-eminence in degrees to be among men for the necessary direction and preservation of them in conformity of living'.¹⁰² The attitudes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean elite still agreed with Sir Thomas Elyot's recommendation of 1531 that a favoured or rewarded servant should not set up for himself 'a fair and pleasant lodging, hanged with riche arras or tapestry, and with goodly plate and other things', but should rather find 'a small cottage' in which he might receive his lord with 'hearty cheer' and 'much humble reverence', he presents the situation as a 'mortal' example of a divine and universal law: the 'first part of justice', towards God 'in honouring him with

¹⁰¹ Sekora, p. 32. Ben Jonson's ironic comment in *Every Man out of his Humour* illustrates the point that visible display was such an index: 'rich apparell has strange vertues: it makes him that hath it without meanes, esteemed for an excellent wit: he that enioys it with meanes, puts the world in remembrance of his meanes' (II.6.45-8), in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), III, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (1927; corr. edn. 1954). It also hints that wealth began to act as an independent signifier of nobility: topographer and chronologist William Harrison remarked in 1577 that 'in England no man is commonly created baron except he may dispend of yearly revenues £1,000, or so much as may fully maintain and bear out his countenance and port' (*The Description of England* [...], ed. by Georges Edelen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 100).

¹⁰² Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, III.3, p. 166.

convenient ceremonies'.¹⁰³ Elyot gave classical doctrines a Christian interpretation with the Neo-Platonic gloss of correspondences and divine order. Luxury 'became' the nobility, and thus display of this type was not a sinful mark of pride, as luxurious display would be in the lower or rising ranks of society.

To illustrate this principle, Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* focused on the 'bright embroidered hedstall' worn by Sir Guyon's stolen horse.¹⁰⁴ In order to identify the horse as the Knight of Temperance's property, two men catch hold of the bridle. They are not given names, being servants or other non-noble stock, and Spenser devotes a whole stanza to the results of such unseemly behaviour: one is kicked in the chest so hard that all his ribs are broken, and the other is bitten on the shoulder, breaking his collarbone. When Guyon calls the horse by its name, Brigadore ('golden bridle'), it immediately calms down and lets Guyon handle it (stanza 34). The implication is that in the proper (noble) hands the embroidered golden bridle is the golden mean of temperance, controlling the dangerous passions of the horse that in meaner hands are uncontrolled and capable of wreaking serious damage. Also of note here is the difference of moral emphasis on the two occasions the bridle is mentioned: in plebeian hands the 'bright embroidered hedstall' has the negative overtones given so often to embroidery in Spenser, whereas in the noble hands of Sir Guyon the embroidered goldwork bridle becomes the naming principle and the means of control, the golden, temperate 'Brigadore'.

For the aristocracy, then, conspicuous display signified nobility, and in individuals

¹⁰³ Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, III.2, pp. 161-2; 161.

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (London and New York: Longman, 1977), v.3.33.7. Subsequent references are given in the text.

lower down the social scale the same superfluity led irrevocably and dangerously to luxury. The use of the fabrics and dyes which signified aristocratic wealth were protected by sumptuary legislation throughout the early modern period and coded varying strata of personage. Cloth of gold and silver were legislated as the prerogative of the ranks of earls and above in the 1533 Act.¹⁰⁵ Velvet was the province of the aristocracy, with crimson, scarlet and blue velvet restricted to peers, knights of the garter and the children of peers above the rank of earl. The wearing of embroidered fabrics was restricted by the 1533 Act to 'Baron sonnes, Knyghtes, or men that may dispend CC.li. by yere', and the wearing of silk was restricted to the gentry and above.¹⁰⁶ Eight panels at Hardwick Hall made from velvet expensively dyed crimson are personalised by an appliquéd cloth of gold and silver strapwork pattern interwoven with embroidered heraldic motifs such as Tudor roses, arranged around Bess of Hardwick's initials 'E. S.' (fig. 1.18). The design combines the luxury fabrics which were intended to figure forth the peerage, and the heraldic motifs which indicated the nobility of the house. The whole is designed firmly to anchor the personage of Bess of Hardwick as Countess of Shrewsbury.

The elite countered arguments against their 'luxurious' spending not only by insisting that their wealth and its display was proper to their estate, but also by making a public virtue out of husbandry and the domestic thrift which they were seen to practise. In a

¹⁰⁵ The stated purpose of this Act was 'the necessary repressing, avoiding and expelling of the inordinate daily excess more and more used in the sumptuous and costly array and apparel customarily worn in this realm, whereof has ensued and daily do chance such sundry high and notable inconveniences as to be to the great, manifest and notorious detriment of the common weal, the subversion of good and politic order in knowledge and distinction of people according to their estates, pre-eminences, dignities and degrees, and to the utter impoverishment and undoing of many inexpert and light persons inclined to pride, mother of all vices', (24 Hen. VIII, c.13, in *The Statutes at Large*, ed. by Danby Pickering (Cambridge: Bentham, 1763), IV: *From the First Year of K. Richard III to the 31st Year of K. Henry VIII, inclusive*).

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1926), p. 218.



Fig. 1.18 One of eight crimson velvet panels made for Bess of Hardwick with applied strapwork design in cloth of gold and silver interwoven with embroidered heraldic motifs and initials E[lizabeth] S[hrewsbury] (Hardwick Hall)

certain sense this was sheer practicality: William Harrison's 1587 *Description of England* had identified a list of 'degrees of reproach' which might prohibit a man from entry into the order of gentlemen of the blood; the fourth degree was 'riot and prodigal excess of expenses'. The reason he gives for financial containment being necessary is not moral, but economic: spending on a profligate scale would create the conditions 'whereby he is not likely to hold out and maintain the port of knight of this order according to the dignity thereof'.¹⁰⁷ But this practical view was frequently masked by a far more complex, philosophical edifice with justificatory overtones: if More's *Utopia* had sought in 1515-16 to 'rescue use values from the ab-usive effects of a system of aristocratic expenditure which engages in wasteful sumptuary excess' and replace it with the notion that 'conspicuous consumption distorts the natural and proper use of things', the elite of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries preferred to consider the fantastic cost of their consumption not as excess, but rather the necessary cost of well-husbanded, elite life.¹⁰⁸

Needlework was a potent signifier of the specific virtue of *oikonomia*. As understood in the 1534 English translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* by Gentian Hervet, *oikonomia* is the 'science which defines itself as the effective use of a possession', or the proper 'use and order' (*chresthai*) of the household (*oikos*).¹⁰⁹ Husbandry is a skill which obtains particularly to the nobility, for in order for the aristocracy to fulfil their main social functions and 'display opulence, dispense bounty, and offer hospitality', they

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, *The Description of England*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 163. Jane Stevenson argues that the necessary 'cost of appearance in public life' was far from being a 'personal act of self-expression' (p. 3). I contend that, on the contrary, the richly decorated surfaces of the (necessarily) luxurious fabrics were harnessed precisely as a surface on which to inscribe extremely sophisticated discourses of social and political self-expression.

¹⁰⁹ Gentian Hervet, *Xenophons Treatise of Householde* (London: Berthelet, 1534), cited in Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England*

must know with the significantly revised Kalendar of the *New Arcadia*, that ‘provision is the foundation of hospitality, and thrift the fuel of magnificence’.¹¹⁰ Husbandry is a skill learned by exemplarity and practice, an active skill so proper to the nobility and ‘familyer to kynges’ that one treatise of manners held it to be ‘both the sign and essence of the most fortunate, the rulers of the commonweal’, and indeed, ‘thei that be riche and fortunate, cannot well kepe theim from housebandry’.¹¹¹ This theory was lived experience in the case of the Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (fig. 1.19) as a child in the late 1620s and 30s:

As for our garments, my Mother did not only delight to see us neat and cleanly, fine and gay, but rich and costly; maintaining us to the height of her estate, but not beyond it; for we were so far from being in debt, before these warrs, as we were rather beforehand with the world; buying all with ready money, not on the score.¹¹²

The children were taught (in those plentiful times) both the fine degrees of magnificence and also sound financial management, both of which parental qualities they were understood to embody and to communicate visually to those with whom they came into contact. Later on in life Cavendish, caring less about what others thought, or at least, caring less about what her outward aspect supposedly communicated about her inner nature, came to criticise unnecessary social expenditure on textiles, berating pregnant women for ‘the wasteful expense of fancy childbed linen’ and other accoutrements of the ‘lying in’.¹¹³ While some were spending excessively on dress ‘before the warrs’, other women also spent little on their wardrobes, through choice or necessity. Anne

(London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 32-33.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence Stone and Jean C. Fawtier-Stone, *An Open Elite?: England 1540-1880* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 204; *Arcadia*, p. 12.

¹¹¹ Lawrence Humphrey, *The Nobles; or, Of Nobilitye: The Original Nature, Dutyes, Right and Christian Institution Thereof* (London: Marshe, 1563), sigs. 18^v, B7^v, cited in Hutson, pp. 37, 38.

¹¹² Cavendish, ‘A True Relation’, p. 269.

¹¹³ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, ed. by James Fitzmaurice (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997).



Fig. 1.19 Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle
(Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge)

Dacres's biographer implies that Dacres's (forced?) economy in her dress expenditure was indicative of virtue, for 'altho' her apparell were decent and grave,

yet both in substance and circumstance it was always homely and plain. Her gowns commonly were of ordinary black stuff of small price, and all the rest was suteable thereto. And by that which was spent yearly in all things appertaining to her apparrell [...] the whole summe seldom amounted to more than twenty pounds by the year sometimes not so much.¹¹⁴

Since fabrics and other materials were so expensive, they were frequently reused. Elite women embroidered 'slips' of flowers small enough to hold in a hand and easily portable (fig. 1.20). These slips were subsequently appliquéd onto backing fabric, often luxurious velvets and silks, to make hangings and other furnishings, and could be reused according to household requirements. The inventory taken on the death of Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, for example, itemises 'the flowers slippes and borders of an imbrodered Cloke with silver cutt into pieces to imbroder some furniture for the howse withall' (p. 361). The 'Inventory of Clothes of Richard Earl of Dorset [...] in Dorset House 2nd June 1619' included a set of ceremonial textiles, including two caparisons. A marginal note records that in the March of the same year the caparisons had been unpicked and reused in another of Dorset's establishments to make a 'Canapie a chaire stools & cuchyons for Knolle gallerie', presumably on the order of Anne Clifford, his wife.¹¹⁵ Ecclesiastical fabric was especially sought after, being an index both of social status and household economy. Domestic reuse of plundered copes had been common practice since the early years of the Reformation: 'many private men's

¹¹⁴ *Lives of Philip Howard [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, ed. by the Duke of Norfolk (London: Hurst and Blacket, 1857), pp. 271-72.

¹¹⁵ Peter and Anne MacTaggart, 'The Rich Wearing Apparel of Richard, 3rd Earl of Dorset', *Costume* 14 (1980), 41-55.

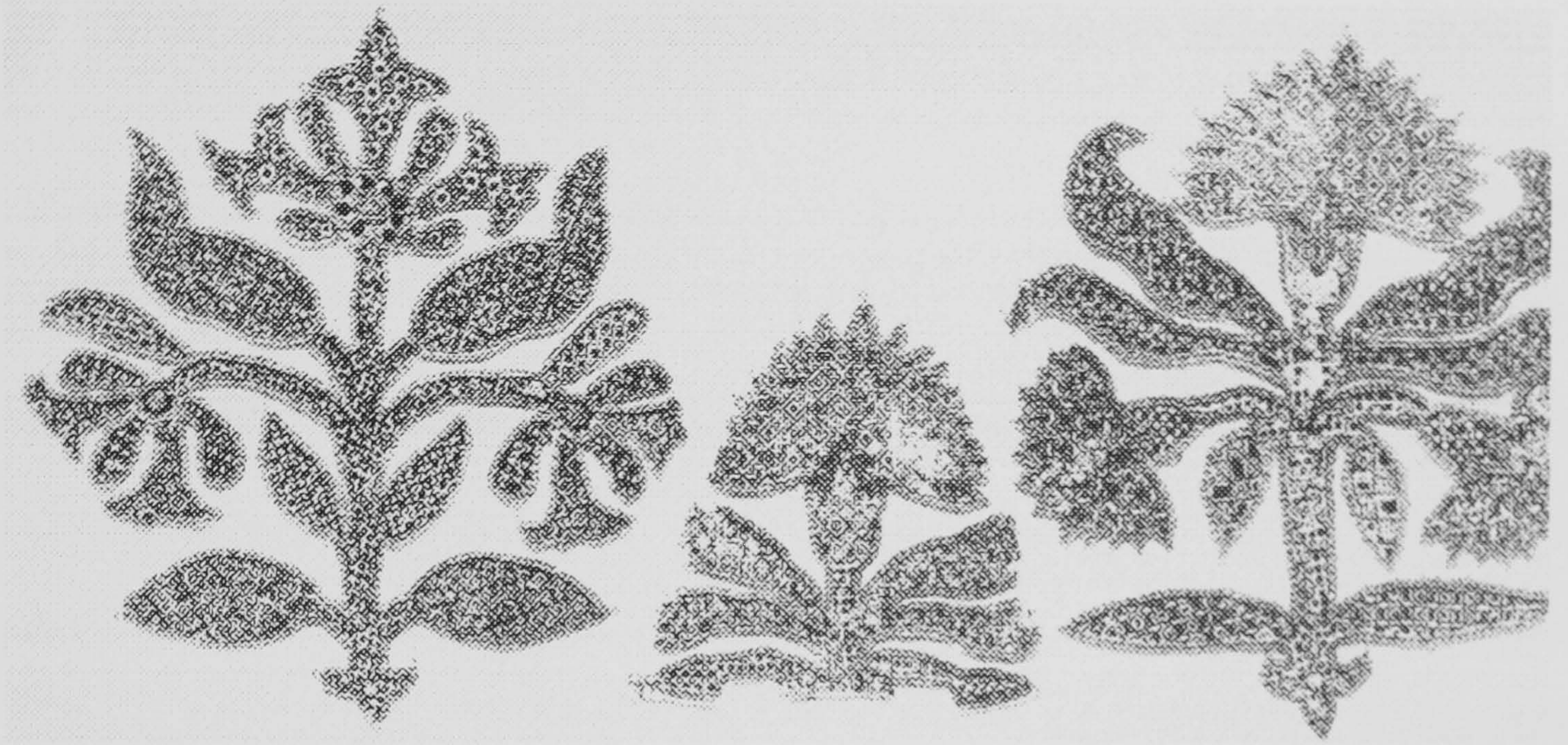


Fig. 1.20 Slips of honeysuckle and pinks. Black silk on white linen, gold thread edging, c. 1585-1600 (present whereabouts unknown)

Parlours,' wrote Heylyn in his 1661 history of the reign of Edward VI,

were hung with Altar-Cloths, their Tables, and Beds covered with Copes, instead of Carpets, and coverlids [...]. It was a sorry House and not worth the naming which had not somewhat of this Furniture in it, though it were onely a fair large Cushion made of a Cope or Altar-Cloth, to adorn their Windows, or make their Chairs appear to have somewhat in them of a *Chair of State*'.¹¹⁶

Wingfield-Digby notes that sumptuous textiles such as velvet, cloth of gold and silver, damask and satin 'were very expensive to import from Italy and it was owing to the spoilation of the monasteries that they were in far greater supply in England than would otherwise have been the case'.¹¹⁷ Decoration was moved from article to article, like the pearl on a 'faier saddell cloth verie richely embrothered with gould, perle, turquoies, two counterfeict rubies' recorded in the 1583 inventory of the Earl of Leicester's effects, with the annotation, 'all the pearle taken of by my Lady the 19th of March 1586'. A portrait thought to date from 1585 of Lettuce Knolles, the Earl of Leicester's wife, shows her wearing a gown decorated with an embroidered motif of ragged staves and plenty of pearl.

¹¹⁶ Peter Heylyn, *Ecclesia Restaurata; or, The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (London: Twyford, Dring et al., 1661), p. 134. Domestic reuse of the same ecclesiastical fabrics under earlier monarchs was, in the seventeenth century, interpreted as an index of material concupiscence and greed under cover of husbandry: Heylyn's view of the stripping of the altars under Edward VI was that the 'Grandeess of the Court' had

cast many an envious Eye on those costly Hangings that Massie Plate, and other rich and pretious Utensils, which adorned those Altars. And *What need all this waste?* said *Judas*; when one poor Chalice onely and perhaps not that might have served the turn. Besides, there was no small spoil to be made of *Copes*, in which the priest officiated at the *Holy Sacrament*; some of them being made of Cloth of Tissue, of Cloth of Gold and Silver, or embroidered Velvet; the meanest being made of Silk, or Sattin, with some decent Trimming. And might not these be handsomly converted unto private uses, to serve as Carpets for their Tables, Coverlids to their Beds, or Cushions to their Chairs, or Windows (sig. A1^r).

Interestingly, from the standpoint of Heylyn in 1661, the insult was not to God, but to the King, for he reads the courtiers' actions as 'intended to defraud the King of so great a Booty' (sig. A1^r).

¹¹⁷ Wingfield-Digby, p. 22.

Bess of Hardwick ordered her household according to principles which enabled her to live an aristocratically luxurious life whilst at the same time using her resources virtuously. This is demonstrated in a letter admonishing her steward Francis Whitfield for his treatment of her half-sister Jane Leche:

I wolde be lothe to have any stranger so yoused in my howse [...]. I cane not lyke ytte to have my syster so yoused. Lyke as I wolde not have any superfleuetè or waste of any thyng, so lyke wyse wolde I have hare to have that whyche ys nedefoulle and nesesary.¹¹⁸

Meticulous accounts were kept of Bess's household expenditure on textiles for furnishing and domestic use, which illustrate careful control over her spending (no waste nor superfluity) as she furnished her house to the highest standards of the aristocratic luxury which she considered a necessity:

The differences in price reflected the quality of the linen, which in turn reflected the status of the users or the circumstances of its use. Thus Bess noted [...] the purchase of 'a quarteren of fyne thread to sewe the lynen that was made agenste my Ladye Warycke comynge iij^s iij^d'. Coarse sewing thread bought at the same time cost a shilling less per quarter pound.¹¹⁹

Bess's tight accounting practice paid off when she was able to respond to Shrewsbury's lawsuit with accurate records of purchases (the Earl claimed he had paid £200 for eight hangings, Bess revised the cost to £180) as did her domestic thrift: much of what the Earl demanded had been used by the household until it fell to pieces (sheets, pillowcases and cupboard cloths) or had been reused for the servants when they were spoiled (feather beds and their furnishings). Shrewsbury claimed he had given board and lodging and wages to numbers of embroiderers to complete a particular set of hangings,

¹¹⁸ Bess of Hardwick, Lady Cavendish to Francis Whitfield, 1552, in Joseph Hunter, *The History of Hallamshire*, enlarged edn by Alfred Gatty (Sheffield: Pawson and Brailsford; London: Bell and Daldy, 1869), p. 107, partially cited in Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 11.

Bess counter-claimed that the hangings had been made ‘in-house’ at Chatsworth by her ‘grooms, women and some boys I kept’, an exercise in thrift and good husbandry, since against the comparably elevated costs of materials labour costs were very low.¹²⁰ Bess claimed, in conclusion, the economic rights of a wife and asserted that Shrewsbury’s behaviour was unaristocratically niggardly: ‘these parcels above demanded by the Earl are things of small value, and mere trifles for so great and rich a nobleman to bestow on his wife in 19 years’.

Bess’s so-called ‘prodigy’ building and expenditure on textiles was by her own lights not profligate. Whilst her contemporaries Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury and Sir Christopher Hatton laboured under colossal debt, Bess’s sumptuous display was based on careful husbandry, and thrift really was the fuel of her magnificence. In Bess’s case, the economic virtue claimed by the sign of her elite needlework was not so much a conventional claim as practical reality.

The social repositioning of wealth and consumption as virtuous husbandry is clearly visible in the contrasting attitudes to wealth in the *Old* and *New Arcadia*. Richard Berrong notes that the narrative of the *Old Arcadia* ‘assigns material wealth an unambiguously positive value as a manifestation and guarantee of high social and moral quality [...] most notably with the repeated mention of Pyrocles’ and Musidorus’s personal belongings’, especially their clothes and jewels.¹²¹ The *New Arcadia* refocuses the notion of aristocratic virtue: ‘it is not the ownership of property that is bad [...] but

¹²⁰ HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, III, p. 161.

¹²¹ Richard Berrong, ‘Changing Attitudes Towards Material Wealth in Sidney’s *Arcadia*’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22 (1991), 331-49 (p. 332)

rather the fascination with wealth for other than its use value'.¹²² In other words, as more and more people entered the elite classes by virtue of being newly wealthy, the notion of an aristocratic 'art' to the practice of sumptuous display was developed, and a 'proper' and 'improper' use for wealth. One may apply Frank Whigham's observations to this scenario, that 'others may be found who do the things a gentleman does, but they cannot do them *properly*'.¹²³ It became crucial to distinguish between those who possessed and displayed wealth by virtue of aristocratic blood, and those who possessed and displayed wealth but had moved up from a lower class. The resulting 'distance', continues Whigham, was 'maintained by the continuous display of inimitable nuance and manner'.¹²⁴ In Whigham's application of the doctrine of *sprezzatura*, 'he [or indeed she] who would occupy exclusively the position of established aristocrat must de-emphasise not only his own efforts at self-manifestation but the substantive efforts of those below'.¹²⁵ 'Manner' was emphasised rather than 'matter', but in the case of sumptuous display of needlework, it was the virtuous, economic, aristocratic manner *of* the matter which was the art.

Needlework was contested ground. It was used simultaneously by its defenders as an index of economic and moral virtue, and by its detractors as a sign of economic and

¹²² New Arcadian attitudes suggest another reading for Spenser's blast against: 'deformed luxury', 'vaine' feasts and 'idle' superfluity. The implication is that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with luxury, feasting and superfluity as long as they are not improperly 'deformed', 'vaine' and 'idle'. The design economy of the Hatfield table carpet (pp. 98-99) was intended simultaneously to put on luxurious show but perhaps also to induce improving contemplation.

¹²³ Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 34.

¹²⁴ Whigham, p. 36. See also Anna Bryson, 'The Rhetoric of Status: Gesture, Demeanour and The Image of the Gentleman in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England', in Gent and Llewellyn, pp. 136-53. Bryson recognises that although 'wealth may be the necessary condition of elite status, [...] it is only the means to the presentation of the right social image' (p. 137).

¹²⁵ Whigham, p. 34.

moral vice. It was the index of an elite life of a certain kind of leisure, and of skill which had different kinds of social value, a high value as an elite accomplishment, and a comparatively low value as a commodified professional skill.¹²⁶ Although needlework was an index of the economic means befitting the status of elite women, the ability to produce needlework was notionally also the symbol of their ability to earn their own keep should economic disaster befall them. The morally instructive *Penelope's Web* by Robert Greene includes the tale of the noble Barmenissa, faithful wife of the Sultan of Egypt, who is supplanted by the scheming concubine Olinda.¹²⁷ Exiled, Barmenissa lives in poverty because the Sultan 'caused [...] Proclamatiõ to be made, that the Princesse should haue no reliefe, but what she earned with her hands, that her ladies should labour, and her maintenance, no other than her owne indeuour could prouide' (sig. D1^r). Barmenissa sets herself up in a small cottage and, 'taking her worke in her hand (for the vse of her needle was her yeerely reuenues', she 'salued her want with labour and her pouertie with patience' (sig. D1^v; sig. D1^r). When questioned on her survival, she explains that despite her wealthy upbringing as 'daughter to the great Chan of Tartaria', she had known that 'principality is no priuiledge against fortune, & that the highest estate is no warrant against mishap' (sig. D4^r). Thus she had learned to 'use the Needle and the Wheele, that both I might eschew ydlenesse in my youth, and [...] the better to brooke pouerty in my age'. Barmenissa commodifies her aristocratic skill, whilst maintaining her elite status, and her virtuous conduct reaps its just reward eventually when Olinda is banished and Barmenissa is reinstated.

¹²⁶ The two elided in the households of the elite, when the lady of the house taught and directed her servants in the daily tasks of needlework, embroidery and mending which the running of the house required. See above pp. 49-50. The direction of the servants was an elite sign in itself, and resulted in the appropriation of their work by the elite woman (see above pp. 24-25).

¹²⁷ Robert Greene, *Penelope's Web: [...] A Christall Mirror of Feminine Perfection [...]* (London: Hodgets, 1601). The work is dedicated to Margaret Clifford and her daughter Anne. Subsequent references are in the text.

IV: The Needlework of Intellect: Actively Embroidering a *Vita Contemplativa*

The notion of superfluity which had to be justified was not limited to consumption of wealth and goods. An answer had to be found for those who spoke out against what they perceived as the evils of time wasted in the consumption of wealth and in rituals of display, as in Spenser's description in *The Faerie Queene*:

deform'd [...] luxury,
Surfeat, misdiet, and vnthrifte wast,
Vaine feasts, and idle superfluity (II.11.12.6).

At the same time as there was widespread concern over the decline of traditional forms of hospitality, the elite imperative for sumptuous display had transformed communal forms of manorial eating into immensely time-consuming feasts. Elyot had given advice in 1531 on one particular way of turning 'superfluous' consumption of time at a luxurious table into an opportunity to consume virtue, advocating the properly noble practice of having 'plate and vessels'

engraved with histories, fables or quick and wise sentences, comprehending good doctrine or counsels; whereby one of these commodities may happen, either that they which do eat or drink, having those wisdoms ever in sight, shall happen with the meat to receive some of them, or by purposing them at the table, may suscite some disputation or reasoning; whereby some part of time shall be saved, which else by superfluous eating and drinking would be idly consumed'.¹²⁸

Perhaps Elyot's advice provides us with a key for the general interpretation of a table carpet, circa 1580, from Hatfield House illustrated and described by Mayorcas, believed

¹²⁸ Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, II.3, p. 103.



Fig. 1.21 Table carpet, c.1580 (Hatfield House

to have been embroidered by members of the Cecil family and to have belonged to William, Lord Burghley (fig. 1.21). It has been in the possession of the family since it was made. Though severely cut and shortened (having worn away along the central fold line), the table carpet with its general design of 'alternate rows of stylised octagonal peonies and libate floral motifs' was recently recorded as having included 'a number of roundels which bore certain lettering'. Although these were 'difficult to decipher,' Mayorcas records a conversation with the curator, who remembered that one of the inscriptions read 'the clouds do hyde the starres'.¹²⁹ The form (roundel plus motto) sounds very much like an emblem form, calculated to 'sussitate disputation or reasonynge'. The table on which the carpet would have been displayed was the symbol of the wealthy householder's provision for his aristocratic (or even royal) guests, the hospitable board, clothed in what is simultaneously dispendious luxury textile and virtuous, educational text.

The need to justify the 'proper use' of the leisure time attendant upon immense wealth was more a generalised concern, however, than a simple matter of sumptuous feasting, and had a wider application to the practice of elite domestic needlework. Even when the virtuous elite were taking advantage of their leisure they were required to show they were using their time wisely. The Hatfield table carpet and Elyot's recommendation focus the 'proper use' of time upon an intellectual activity, 'disputation or reasoning', to stave off superfluous idleness. Superfluity of time gave rise to a highly developed culture of leisure in the upper classes. Indeed leisure was identified as the defining characteristic of a similar class by Thorstein Veblen in 1899, who thus took his place in a long tradition of leisure theorists stretching back to the classical world. According to

¹²⁹ Mayorcas, p. 29.

Xenophon, Socrates defined a link between nobility, leisure and the moral imperative to lead a civic *vita activa* in his comment that craftsmen have ‘small leysure to sette theyr mind and diligence to doe theyr friendes any good, nor also the commonwelth’.¹³⁰

Aristotle supported Socrates’ thesis with the added weight of social inevitability:

Masters were ordained for political rule, for only they were free to pursue other than basic, physical needs. Their birth granted independence, their education confirmed it. From independence flowed leisure, which led to responsibility for government, a central function of which was to ensure that the great majority of persons remained independent and continued to perform the essential and involuntary labour that sustained the legislators’ independence.¹³¹

The concept of leisure was linked, not with *lack* of activity, but with *opportunity* for activity. Leisure meant available time, time to be filled. The vice of idleness and inactivity was to be avoided at all costs, and superfluity of leisure accounted for and justified.¹³²

The conception of their lives in terms of binary opposites such *otium* and *negotium*, or the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* served the male members of the elite by allowing them to theorise a virtuous sum total of their time. Peter Burke has carried out a preliminary etymological study of the ‘new’ concept of leisure in ‘the Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe’, in which he begins to pick apart the rhetoric used in the renaissance to define and structure its economies of time.¹³³ Burke traces the shifts in meaning of these terms through philosophical thought to the early modern humanists,

¹³⁰ Hervet, *Xenophons Treatise of Householde*, sig. B3^v, cited in Hutson, p. 35.

¹³¹ Summarised in Sekora, p. 54.

¹³² C.f. Grace Mildmay’s itemisation of her ‘work’, so similar to her itemisation of her childhood accomplishments. See above, p. 48.

¹³³ Peter Burke, ‘The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe’, *Past and Present*, 146 (1995), 136-50.

for whom *otium* signified ‘a life of study as opposed to the “business” [*negotium*] of trade and politics’.¹³⁴ Elizabethan and Jacobean elite women were not barred from the intellectual pursuits of both *otium* and *negotium*; their standards of intellectual education are now understood to have been high, and their traditional accomplishments were expected to include accounting and estate and domestic management. At court women are documented taking an active political role. But there were still spheres of activity and competence which were understood to be appropriate to their gender. Elyot does not give details of the sex of ‘they which do eat or drink’ at his imaginary feast who might be moved to ‘some disputation of reasoning’ by the ‘histories, fables or quick and wise sentences’ engraved upon the plate and vessels. But in the case of the Hatfield table carpet, believed to be of domestic production, it was the women of the house who would have directed its design and its making, and they who would have assembled the roundels with lettering designed to stimulate intellectual activity. Needlework was both the sign of time wisely and gainfully employed in the *vita activa* proper to an elite woman, and a site where the intellect and wits might be plied.

If needlework was an acceptable way for elite women to occupy their leisure time virtuously, it was also an effective way to fill unpleasantly enforced leisure. Anne Clifford as Countess of Dorset used her work with the needle as her ‘chief help to pass away the time’ while she was miserably staying at Knole, ‘like an Owl in the Desert’ in 1617 (p. 90). But even here Clifford’s intellect was stimulated, for on 12-13 August of that year Clifford records having the *Arcadia* read aloud to her whilst she embroidered, and a week later, on 19 August, she went to visit the Sidneys at Penshurst (p. 91). Clifford must have compared her own situation to Sidney’s Arcadian protagonist

¹³⁴ Burke, p. 140.

Pamela when Pamela tells her gaoler Cecropia that the only reason she had embroidered her purse was to ‘make some tedious hours believe I thought not of them’.¹³⁵

The intellectual resonance of needlework in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period did not obtain solely for the needleworking woman. Needlework existed as a widely diffuse cultural sign and functioned as intellectual currency even on a linguistic level. Many women ‘signed’ their needlework with monogram devices or with their initials: Mary Stuart was one such. And ‘signed’ is an apt word: the *OED* provides an etymological link between renaissance discursive practice and the practice of renaissance embroidery, citing Sir Walter Raleigh as coining the use of the word ‘embroder’ in his 1614 *History of the World* to indicate a rhetorical trope, embellishment with rhetorical ornament: ‘the Grecian historians of poets embroder and intermixe the tales of ancient times with a world of fictions’.¹³⁶ George Puttenham too, in his theoretical discourse on ‘Ornament Poeticall’, used the extended example of fashionable dress and its embroidered ornament as a simile for the ‘fashioning of our makers language and stile to such purpose as it may delight and allure as well the mynde as the eare of the heareres with a certaine noueltie and strange maner of conueyance’.¹³⁷ Ladies of the aristocracy, he argues, ‘thinke themselues more amiable in euery mans eye, when they be in their richest attire, suppose of silkes or tyssewes & costly embroderies, then when they go in cloth or in any other plaine and simple apparell’.¹³⁸ The rhetorical ‘figures and figurative speeches’ which are the linguistic equivalent of such ornament are described

¹³⁵ *New Arcadia*, Book III, Chapter 10, p. 484. It was an irony of fate that Clifford was herself to become Countess of Pembroke on her marriage thirteen years later to Philip Herbert, the 4th Earl.

¹³⁶ Raleigh, Sir Walter, *The History of the World*, (London: Burre, 1614), II. 367 (*OED*, ‘embroder’, sense 2.c).

¹³⁷ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* [...] 1589, ed. by Edward Arber, English Reprints, 15 (London: Murray, 1869), p. 149.

¹³⁸ Puttenham, p. 150.

as ‘the flowers as it were and coulours that a Poet setteth upon his language by arte, as the embroiderer doth his stone and perle, or passements of gold vpon the stuffe of a Princely garment’, and Puttenham warns against rhetorical excess by the rhetorical method of demonstrating its correspondence in needlework, which would ‘disfigure the stuffe and spoil the whole workmanship taking away all bewtie and good liking from it’.¹³⁹ The meta-rhetorical complexity with which Puttenham lays out his thesis on rhetoric with rhetorical grace, embroidering his discourse with a discourse on embroidery, is striking. It has the effect of accruing the sumptuousness and the sophistication that is coded within court dress to his literary powers, but also of intellectualising the art of aristocratic textile ornament, of locating it within a literary or philosophical schema. Ben Jonson, more concisely, exhorts that ‘our style should be like a skeine of silke, to be carried, and found by the right thred, not ravel’d, and perplex’d; then all is a knot, a heape’.¹⁴⁰ When Elizabethan and Jacobean literary theorists reach for similes to describe their art they alight on needlework.

It was not just the literary theorists who made the connection between needlework and discourse. Wroth’s Antissia, heartbroken with love for Amphilanthus, frequented a willow tree, ‘witnessing forsakennes round about, so as she might be held in that sad shade from the heat of Sun-hope-joy’.¹⁴¹ Initially Antissia turns to verbal means of expressing her pain in words (ll.31-33), but ‘then carved she in the trunke of that tree, till she had imbroidered it all over with characters of her sorrow’ (ll.34-35). For Antissa, to ‘witness’ first involved words, and then when these fail, she turns to symbols. Picking up Raleigh’s coinage, the carved ‘imbroidery’ is an ornament or

¹³⁹ Puttenham, p. 138.

¹⁴⁰ from *Discoveries*, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), VIII (1947; corr. edn. 1954), p. 624.

¹⁴¹ *Urania*, p. 328.

decoration, but also a means of verbal (or perhaps symbolic) discourse, a more powerful, and lasting, testament to her emotions and means of venting them than speech alone. Even Spenser (who habitually employed needlework as a negative sign) recognised that textiles were used to communicate intellectual capacity: the Venus and Adonis tapestries in Castle Joyous demonstrate ‘wondrous wit’ (III.i.34.6) and, ever interested in the relationship between art and the intellect, he sets out his response to the tapestries in the House of Busirane in a series of precise rhetorical devices.¹⁴² The tapestries become a vehicle for Spenser to showcase his literary art, as he parallels their art with verbal artistry.

A complex and revealing incidence of the intellectualisation of needlework is provided by Mary Sidney Herbert (fig. 1.22). She undertook to complete her brother Philip’s translation of the Psalms, which she presented to Queen Elizabeth I. Sidney was a well-known patron of the arts herself, but in the dedicatory poem to Elizabeth, ‘Even now that Care’, she offered her own text to her royal patron as a ‘handmaids taske’ (l. 90) as a metaphorical woven cloth which ‘hee did warpe, I weav’d this webb to end’ (l. 27). The text becomes a textile which proclaims identity but also political fealty: ‘And I the Cloth in both our names present, | A liverie robe to bee bestowed by thee’ (ll. 33-34).¹⁴³ This mapping of text onto textile is more than a simple etymological correspondence, an elegant metaphor or a springboard for persuasive argument. In the dedicatory poem Mary Sidney uses her experience as a needlewoman as a powerful way of structuring an entire intellectual opus, simultaneously locating it as a work of creation, arguing the suitability for a woman author by rhetorical sleight of hand, and presenting it as a

¹⁴² See Claud A. Thompson, ‘Spenser’s “Many faire pourtraicts, and many a faire feate”’, *SEL*, 12 (1972), 21-32.

¹⁴³ Dedicatory Poem in the Tixtall Manuscript of the *Psalmes*, in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, ed. by Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon and Michael G



Fig. 1.22 Nicholas Hilliard: Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. Miniature on vellum, c. 1590 (National Portrait Gallery)



Fig. 1.23 Mary Boyle Rich, Dowager Countess of Warwick, aged 53

humble demonstration of loyalty by a faithful servant. The Sidneian Psalms in their entirety are thus framed by a metaphor skilfully constructed from women's work, and this is echoed internally in the psalms themselves, both thematically and philosophically.

Margaret Hannay has noted how Mary Sidney often uses the Psalms to meditate on essentially female qualities of experience, expanding those parts of her sources which resonate with an aristocratic woman's experience of filial and marital obedience, pregnancy, childbirth or the daily routine, including needlework and embroidery.¹⁴⁴ Thus, says Hannay, Sidney draws on her own experience as Maid of Honour to expand the Geneva Bible's allegorical version of Psalm 45, v. 13: 'the King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of broydered golde'.¹⁴⁵ It is surely with first-hand knowledge of dressing Queen Elizabeth, argues Hannay, that Sidney provides a more extended exposition of the symbolic role of state robes, and indeed, of all the queen's garments, in the ceremonial creation of the visual counterpart to the politico-philosophical doctrine of the queen's 'two bodies', personal and monarchical, human and divine:

This Queene that can a king hir father call,
doth only shee in upper garment shine?
Naie under clothes, and what shee weareth all,
golde is the stuffe the fasshion arte divine.
brought to the king in robe imbrodred fine (ll. 49-53)¹⁴⁶

In Psalm 144, Sidney uses this language of ornament and decoration 'to emphasise the

Brennan, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), I, pp. 102-04.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret P. Hannay, "'House-confined Maids': The Presentation of Woman's Role in the *Psalmes* of the Countess of Pembroke', *ELR*, 24 (1994), 44-71 (pp. 55-64).

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Hannay, "'House-confined Maids'", p. 55.

¹⁴⁶ *Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, II, pp. 39-40, also cited in Hannay, "'House-confined Maids'", p. 55.

structural as well as the decorative function of daughters in the palace':

As Pillers both doe beare
and garnish kingly hall:
our daughters straight and faire,
each howse embellish shall (ll. 53-56).¹⁴⁷

Here the philosophical correspondence between god and monarch, the monarch and her father, the courtiers and their monarch, the aristocratic daughters and their families may be glimpsed through the notion of ornament, which Sidney employed earlier in the image of gold tissue and passementerie, and sumptuously embroidered royal robes.

Sidney draws on her experience at court of the embroidered robes in the Wardrobe of State to ornament her translations, but in a more inward-looking passage, Psalm 139, she uses the image of the humble origins of embroidery in the workshops of paid embroiderers to structure, not only her psalm, but also a meditative conception of her entire created being and purpose in life, as an instrument of God on which may be wrought an embroidered work fit to honour him:

Thou, how my back was beam-wise laid,
and rafting of my ribbs dost know:
know'st ev'ry point
of bone and joynt
how to this whole these partes did grow,
in braue embrodry faire araid,
though wrought in shopp both dark and low (ll. 50-56).¹⁴⁸

As building frame becomes first skeletal frame and then embroidery frame, the skeletal

¹⁴⁷ *Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, II, p. 244, also cited in Hannay, "'House-confined Maids'", p. 57.

¹⁴⁸ *Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, II, p. 235. Hannay notes ("House-confined Maids", p. 63) that Sidney here expands significantly on her source Bèze's 'when I was fashioned in the darke cave, as it were with needleworke' (v. 15).

structuring of the psalmist's (Sidney's) body is mirrored in the poetic form itself. The mystery of the genesis of the woman's form, highlighted by the resonant mention of 'ribbs', bypasses the Old Testament androcentric narrative and connects directly with God in a work of creation imagined in terms of Sidney's growth in the womb:

while yet I in my mother dwelt,
all that me cladd
from thee I hadd.

Thou in my frame hast strangely delt' (ll. 44-47).

Sidney here expands the notion of the skeleton as 'frame', from the preceding lines, meditating upon the correspondence between the embroidery frame on which her 'braue embrodry' is 'faire araid', and her skeletal frame ornamented by her skin and, of course, her courtly dress. The reminder of humble origins serves to put the glory and luxury of the final embroidered product (both literal and metaphorical) in perspective, to bring one back to the idea of 'handmaid'. The whole stanza is much like a meditation, but one so carefully crafted as to remember, in its own construction, the corresponding geneses of a work of embroidery and of the human body.

Needlework was the subject of meditations by a number of women. Grace Mildmay ordered her very full and active life until her death in 1620 at the age of sixty-eight as though in its entirety it were a meditation or an offering to God. Whether drawing fruit and flowers freehand for the purposes of working the designs into her needlework, whether reading, dispensing remedies or playing the lute, 'I thought of nothing else but that I was a doing in euery perticuler one of these said exercises'.¹⁴⁹ Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (fig. 1.23) recorded at least three meditations involving textiles some half century after Mildmay's biographical record, such as the following, on her

¹⁴⁹ Martin, p. 60. See also above, p. 48

embroidered bed-hangings:

Upon seeing, as soon as I waked in the Morning, upon my Bed's tester, just over my head, a fine embroidered Crown.

After I had, by the mercy of God to me, had the refreshment of an uninterrupted nights rest, and by sleep (which is the nurse of nature, the parenthesis to all my cares and griefs) been composed, at my first opening of my eyes, they were entertained with the sight of a crown which by the upholsterer was embroidered at the tester of my bed, just over my head; and, by the light of a great blazing fire was made in my chamber, which through my drawn curtains gave so great a light that it showed me this crown (which before I had not taken notice of) and made it also appear very bright and fine. As this sight was the first I viewed, so these thoughts were the first I thought: that my awaking from this natural rest may be useful to mind me of my waking from the sleep of death and this crown may do so of the unwithering one that fades not away.¹⁵⁰

Rich follows exactly a pattern of reflection that her brother Robert Boyle described in his *Occasional Reflections Upon Several Subjects* (1665), performing 'an Application of what one was taking notice of, that the thing Pointed at, may be some important Moral Instruction, or perhaps some Theological Mystery'.¹⁵¹ That is, that the act of seeing the

¹⁵⁰ Cited from the Diary of Mary Rich (BL Add MSS 27351-5), without further reference, in Smith, *Mary Rich*, pp. 340-41. An extensive diary of 'Occasional Meditations by Lady Warwick, 1663-1677' is contained in British Library, Add MSS, 27356. The diary reveals much about Rich's sense of the spiritual in her daily experience. Meditations are performed upon whatever Rich did or encountered, as she sought to understand her life in terms of correspondences. This meditation from 1663 is typical: 'Upon a very fine gonde [gown], but haveing so great a spot in it, which was more deaserneable because it was of so brite and vivid a color' (fol. 50^v). The spiritual lesson of this stained fabric is drawn in terms of a simile: 'How well this spote might be compared to the faileinges of Godes Children which ar more conspicuous and apparente to the eyes of the world' (fol. 51^r). In 1668 Rich visited a mercer's shop, to order additions to her daughter's wardrobe, giving rise to a meditation 'upon chuseing apatron [pattern] of a fine stofe, but thinkeing it much finar [than] when I veiwd it in the shope in the whole piece' (fol. 95^v). The spiritual lesson is inextricably bound up with the process of meditation itself, as Rich experiences dress patterns as a pattern of what she will be given in heaven, and fabric of unexpected quality as an earthly mirror of her hoped-for heavenly reward: 'how carefully have I viewed all the patrones ware presented me to chuse one out of for my young Ladyes gondes. which when I had done and afterwarde saw the stuffe in the shope in the whole peice I could not beleeeve but that the mersare had to my advantage changed what I fixt upon, and given me amuch better stof tell he had undeaseaved me by asheureing me the contrary, O my Soule thus will my mersyfull heavenly father deale with me when I come to heaven though he gives me heare (as I may call them) patrones or taistes of Glory' (fol. 96^r).

¹⁵¹ Robert Boyle, *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects, whereto is Premis'd a Discourse about*

embroidered crown ('which before I had not taken notice of') is followed by the application of her reason or intellect to discover the moral or divine truth it illustrates, since from a Neo-Platonic standpoint the created world exists to reflect God and as such may be used as the grounds for some higher meditation. Again we note that it is seeing which is powerful stimulus to more profound thought ('As this sight was the first I viewed, so these thoughts were the first I thought'), and recall Bacon's views on the subject, underscoring embroidery's potential for striking the intellect through the visual faculty.

Mary Rich's meditations, in the mid- to late-seventeenth century, conform to the principle of a *vita contemplativa* in a devotional sense, but the devotional exercises are elaborated on a fairly simple level, using a Puritan model of meditation of moving from an incident in everyday life to a biblical text ('the Crown of glory that fadeth not away', from I Peter 5. 4). Rich's piety was considered exemplary (a noted circle of Puritan divines formed around her household), and some of her devotional writings were published posthumously in 1686.¹⁵²

There is a wealth of unnoticed intellectual content in the needlework of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, and not just in the way some women were free to include it in their writing, or in the way some writers used it as grounds for metaphors or springboards for elegant rhetorical displays. The iconographical content of much of the extant needlework of the period consists of visual *copia* and historical *exempla*. The intellectual context in which these rhetorical devices are rooted is described by Lorna

Such Thoughts (London: Herringman, 1605), sig. A6^v.

¹⁵² Rich died in 1678.

Hutson:

The faculty of interpretation, or skill in understanding the meaning of a text was tied in with the exercise of the reader's judgement and invention in the selection and transformation of the elements of the text into *exempla* applicable to future occasions for the production of persuasive discourse.¹⁵³

Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women* [1531] had been one of a number of apologies and defences which sanctioned Elizabethan and Jacobean elite women's intellectual life:

the cardinal virtues, celebrated in antiquity and represented in classical philosophy and history, have been (and can be) as well exemplified by women as men. That is, they seek to establish a theoretical equality of virtue between the sexes, particularly emphasising the qualities and attributes required for participation in civic life.¹⁵⁴

Some instances of actual renaissance needlework (and not simply their harnessing for analogous literary purposes) could readily be considered as 'persuasive discourse': as iconographical dramatisations of the genre of the defence or apology employing the same rhetoric of exemplarity as the literary texts.

Such an example is Zenobia, who appears as a companion panel to Lucretia in Bess of Hardwick's 'Virtues and Vices' set of hangings. Bess's deployment of eight virtuous women from classical antiquity and myth closely resembles the method of proceeding commonly used by humanist defences, which 'establish the excellence of women by referring to examples from history; they celebrate the full humanity of a wife in relation

¹⁵³ Hutson, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵⁴ Constance Jordan, 'Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women*', in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 242-58 (p. 242).

to her husband; or they argue for the humanist education of girls'.¹⁵⁵ Zenobia was modelled for subsequent generations by Elyot, who had used her to trope women's independent strength and resourcefulness and the social importance of women's 'natural' talents.¹⁵⁶ The hangings are stylistically unique for their time, as Levey has remarked in her study of the Hardwick textiles, and she speculates that Mary Stuart might have been one source for technical information.¹⁵⁷ Levey also suggests that Mary Stuart is a likely source for the overall concept of the work. When the hangings were sewn circa 1573 Mary Stuart had been imprisoned at Elizabeth's command with the Shrewsburys for four years after her flight into England, and the two women were at that time regularly collaborating on the design and execution of embroidery projects. I would support Levey's argument by adding that Mary's education at the court of France as the future wife of the Dauphin François included a particular study of exemplary historical female figures, and, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, she delivered a speech in their defence at the Louvre, in front of Henri II, Queen Catherine de' Medici and their Court. A manuscript copy of this speech was in the library handed over to James VI of Scotland in 1569.¹⁵⁸

In the final analysis, the collections of surviving Elizabethan and Jacobean needlework in the great houses such as Hatfield House would suggest that the needlework carpets and valances produced domestically or the products of detailed commissions were sites

¹⁵⁵ Jordan, 'Feminism and the Humanists', p. 243. In her famous speech at Tilbury, Elizabeth I used analogous arguments.

¹⁵⁶ For the Renaissance Zenobia see Valerie Wayne, 'Zenobia in Medieval and Renaissance Literature', in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 48-65, and Jordan, 'Feminism and the Humanists'. For a discussion of Bess of Hardwick's use of Zenobia and the other prototypical heroines in her appliqué hangings, see the case study below.

¹⁵⁷ Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, pp. 69, 65.

¹⁵⁸ J. Robertson, ed., *Inventaires de la Royne Descosse Douairiere de France: A Catalogue of Jewels, Dresses, Furniture, Books and Paintings of Mary, Queen of Scots, 1556-1569* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1863), pp. cxliii-cxlvii.

for elite women to express their intellectual ideas, and that needlework and embroidery functioned as a powerful figure in the female-authored literature of women such as Mary Wroth and Mary Sidney. The yoking together of needlework and intellect was not only 'acceptable', but 'accepted'. Nonetheless, as far as one can judge from the surviving corpus of needlework, Bess of Hardwick and Mary Stuart were without parallel in the degree to which they used needlework to express complex philosophical and political ideas. Mary's exceptional education, upbringing and experiences and Bess of Hardwick's powerful ambition combined in particular circumstances in which Mary was permitted few activities other than needlework. The result was the production of needlework discourses of such complexity and sophistication that they warrant extended individual study.

While women such as Bess of Hardwick, Mary Stuart and Dorothy Selby focused increasingly insistently upon the possibilities of using needlework as text, others, especially those educated in the Jacobean reign and coming to adulthood in Caroline England and the Civil War, moved away from the educational imperatives of their youth and turned away from needlework text towards literary texts. One such woman was Anne Clifford.

In her Appleby Triptych Anne Clifford's 56-yr-old self looks out of the panel to the right of her Great Portrait at the spectator with a self-possessed gaze (fig. 1.24). The picture space she inhabits is very different from the orderly room on the left. The books are no longer arranged with precision on the shelves, but heaped up in haphazard fashion, as though they are frequently consulted, and in a great hurry, serving the practical needs of the reader on a day-to-day basis rather than forming a library overseen



Fig. 1.24 Right-hand panel of Appleby triptych,
Anne Clifford aged 56

by tutors, accessed for the purposes of learning.¹⁵⁹ A large swagged curtain is hitched up temporarily behind Anne as she stands at the table, its proximity to the portraits of her deceased husbands (which mirror those of her tutors in the left-hand panel) suggesting that it may even serve to cover them for a less formal occasion. Of the feminine accomplishments which are such artful elements of the fifteen-year-old's composed world, the viola da gamba is replaced by a small dog, jumping up at his mistress's hand, and a rather strange cat, curled up behind her skirts. Of the needlework and pattern book, upon which Clifford's fifteen-year-old left hand rests in the left-hand panel and which is so much a feature of her early diaries, there remains not a trace. It is replaced in Anne's mature life by an open scroll and two heavy books (one of which is the Bible), upon which her hand rests confidently.

What we have left of Anne's handiwork confirms the portrait's shift away from needlework towards text. During the 26 years of her widowhood Anne poured her considerable energies into rennovating her northern estates and to writing her 'Great Books', the three 'Books of Record' which preserve the genealogy of her Clifford ancestry. These include wills and deeds, researched by Anne and her mother to present as evidence in court to support their case to win back Anne's inheritance rights.¹⁶⁰ Of her own needlework little remains, only a bed and a chair in needlework are still extant.

¹⁵⁹ Clifford's books in the right-hand panel include the works of Jonson, poems by Donne and Herbert, sermons by Donne and King, Moore's *Map of Mans Mortalitie*, Strode's *Anatomy of Mortality*, Antoninus' *Meditations*, and Wootton's *Elements of Architecture*. They contrast with the books in the neat, ordered library of the 15-year-old Clifford, which include Gerard's *Herball*, Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Sidney's *Arcadia* (which Clifford records having read to her in her diary, see above p. 101). Her education is seen to be rounded out by works such as Montaignes' essays, Daniel's *Chronicle of England*, and Camden's *Britannia*. A detailed list of the books in the triptych is given in Williamson, pp. 190-91.

¹⁶⁰ The Great Books also contain the final portion of the extensive diaries which Clifford kept at various times in her life (the others, patchily covering the years 1603-50, are held variously in the Sackville Collection at Kent County Record Office and the British Library, and the section covering the final months of her life is kept in private hands), called by Clifford 'A Summary of My Life', as though her life proper began with the death of her second husband, freeing her into a more autonomous and active

How to account for this shift? Anne expended a good deal of time, money and physical and emotional energy on her inheritance struggle in her early life, and on creating the persona of a landowner in her own right, separate from her husbands, who were so voraciously pursuing her inheritance for themselves. Clifford's internal response was to keep her own self completely separate, as she records in her autobiography:

I lived in both these my lords' great familys as the river of Roan or Rodamus runs through the lake of Geneva, without mingling any part of its streams with that lake; for I gave myself wholly to retiredness, as much as I could, in both those great families, and made good books and virtuous thoughts my companions.¹⁶¹

The state of wedlock subsumed a woman's life into that of her husband; Clifford's simile, argues Hoby, is 'a woman's answer to this'.¹⁶² Books took over: the importance of being seen as a reader for Anne Clifford, argues Lamb, was that the readership of the books in the portraits and mentioned in the diaries was implicitly male: 'her occupation of the role of implied (male) reader of these works apparently facilitated her assumption of the traditionally male role of landowner'.¹⁶³ Lamb's evidence for the assertion is a strong one; she cites Anne Clifford's feeling that she takes on something of the author she reads: 'a little part of [Chaucer's] beauteous sperett infusses ittselfe in mee'.¹⁶⁴ Here Clifford follows the example of one of her favourite authors, Spenser (to whom she erected a monument in Westminster Abbey): the narrator in *The Faerie Queene* acknowledges his plot borrowing from Chaucer: 'Through infusion sweete/ Of thine

sphere.

¹⁶¹ *Lives of Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery (1590-1676) and of her Parents: Summarized by Herself*, ed. by J. P. Gilson (London: Roxburgh Club, 1916), p. 40 (cited in Acheson, p. 35).

¹⁶² Hoby, p. 76.

¹⁶³ Mary Ellen Lamb, 'The Agency of the Split Subject: Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Reading', *ELR*, 22 (1992), pp. 347-68 (p. 349).

¹⁶⁴ BL Harley MS 7001, fol. 212, cited in Lamb, p. 355.

owne spirit, which doth in me survive,/ I follow here the footing of thy feete'.¹⁶⁵ Spenser, says Lamb, 'used his "infusion" from Chaucer to write a portion of *The Faerie Queene*; Clifford uses hers to cope with her "troubles". Instead of writing a literary work, Clifford has embodied Chaucer in the text of her life'.¹⁶⁶ She is very literal, therefore, when she speaks of making 'good books and virtuous thoughts my companions'. Clifford's construction of a self by reading and by thus inheriting the spirit of her literary predecessors legitimises by analogy her claims to inherit land from her ancestors who have also passed down some of their spirit. It is, concludes Lamb, the 'community' of dead authors who 'inhabited a single past' with her dead ancestors which 'validated her identity as an heir':

an anonymous translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, dedicated to [...] Philip Herbert, quoted the philosopher Zeno for recommending the attainment of happiness 'by resorting to the dead and having familiar conversation with them' [...]. Anne Clifford assembled authors as members of an invisible society which, together with her ancestors (especially her deceased mother) and God himself, supported her identity as landowner when her immediate society of living relatives did not'.¹⁶⁷

In needlework Clifford's consuming drive towards recording her ancestry is preserved in a chair at Skipton, with the needleworked arms of the Dowager Countess of Cumberland, Clifford, quartering Veteripont and impaling Dacres.¹⁶⁸ Clifford's fierce political allegiances are also proclaimed in the royalist oakleaves prominent in the

¹⁶⁵ *The Faerie Queene*, 4.2.34.6-7, cited in Lamb, p. 355.

¹⁶⁶ Lamb, p. 355.

¹⁶⁷ Lamb, p. 354.

¹⁶⁸ The chair is illustrated in Martin Holmes, *Proud Northern Lady: Lady Anne Clifford, 1590-1676* (London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1975). A monument set up on the Appleby road, known as 'the Countess' Pillar', which marks the last place where Anne and her mother Margaret Russell saw each other. Its heraldry shows the Clifford arms impaling Veteripont and Clifford impaling Russell, 'the one being the most remote, the other being the most recent of lady Anne's forebears' (Clifford, *Diary*, p. 18), suggesting a tendency towards genealogical circularity echoed by the Appleby Triptych in the placing of the young and the old Anne, the figures encompassing the portrayal of her life.

design. But her later diaries record no instances of needleworking, in stark contrast to the early years of her life, those interminable days stranded at Knole, filled with endless embroidery projects. Clifford's later diaries record days filled with writing and dictating to her amanuensis, reading, and writing some more, contrasting the vicissitudes of her early life with the serenity of her later life when she was her own mistress. The gifts of her own needlework with which she forged relationships with her peers and with the royal family during her years as a lonely wife, assailed from every side by demands for her money and estates, gradually gave way to gifts to her servants and local tenants of gloves and other small tokens, bought in and recorded meticulously in her account books.¹⁶⁹

Eventually text even overwrote the needlework on her furniture. In his eulogy at her funeral, Bishop Rainbowe describes the scene in her bedchamber, the bedchamber of a woman who is actually, not just notionally, at the head of her household, and who caused texts written on paper to be pinned up on the walls and bedhangings as a perpetual edification to the women in her care who were working now for her.

She would frequently bring out of the rich Store-house of her Memory, things new and old, Sentences or Sayings of remark, which she had read or learned out of Authors and with these her Walls, her Bed, her Hangings, and Furniture must be adorned; causing her Servants to write them in Papers, and her Maids to pin them up, that she, or they, in the time of their dressing, or as occasion served, might remember, and make their discants on them. So that, though she had not many Books in her Chamber, yet it was dressed up with the flowers of a library.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ 'The odd pages of Lady Anne's Account Book', August 1673, Williamson, p. 509

¹⁷⁰ Edward Rainbow, Bishop of Carlisle, *A Sermon Preached at the Interrment of Anne, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery* (London, Royston, 1677; repr. Carlisle: Jefferson, 1839-1844), pp. 7-64 (p. 40).

She turned her bedchamber, as Lewalski puts it, ‘into a species of commonplace book’.¹⁷¹

Ultimately, in this case, needlework resisted Clifford’s drive towards producing textual memory and memorialisation at the expense of producing needlework. Although the funeral oration memorialised Anne’s textual mnemonic strategies, it was not the paper texts pinned to the hangings but the hangings themselves which physically survived, were the ‘subjects of discourse’, and were recorded into textual memory.¹⁷² For when Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, broke his journey home from Edinburgh in 1725 to visit Appleby Castle, he noted alongside the volumes of family history, Clifford’s ‘wedding bed [...] being all of curious needlework, as is the whole furniture belonging to that apartment where the Judges used to be reposed in when they came to this place’.¹⁷³ The needleworked slips of flowers survived even the ‘flowers of a library’, superimposed on scraps of paper with pins.

This initial survey has re-examined variety of social contexts into which Elizabethan and Jacobean elite needlework needs to be relocated if its value and significance is to be gauged. The survey now provides a framework within which to consider the needlework of Bess of Hardwick, making visible in her textiles such discourses as the production of persona and personage, the culture of wealth, and the expression of intellectual activity.

¹⁷¹ Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 139.

¹⁷² Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 139.

¹⁷³ HMC, *Portland (Welbeck)*, VI (Harley Papers), p. 132.

CASE STUDY

EMBROIDERING A VIRTUOUS PERSONA: THE NEEDLEWORK OF BESS OF HARDWICK

Over the course of a remarkably long life, from the Hardwick family's impoverished state at the time of her father's death in 1528 to her death as Countess of Shrewsbury in 1608, Bess of Hardwick (fig. B.1) amassed a spectacular fortune based on a series of advantageous marriages, calculated risks, and superb financial management practices.¹ With her fortune she constructed her vast estates with their sumptuously furnished, legendary houses: Chatsworth, and Old and New Hardwick Halls (fig. B.2). Four hundred years after Bess of Hardwick's death, the extraordinary collection of her textiles at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire still communicates a powerful message. Preserved under the terms of Bess's will, her tapestries, hangings, cushions, bed-covers and linen still project, with all the force and vigour of early modern visual codes, the public persona and dynastic ambitions of Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury. Still assembled in the architectural showcase that the collection was designed to fill, under the coronetted E.S. initials on the parapets that are visible for miles around, it is the most complete collection of sixteenth century textiles associated with one individual available to us, together with a wealth of biographical detail and documentation.² The

¹ David Durant's biography *Bess of Hardwick: Portrait of an Elizabethan Dynast* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977) convincingly sees the primary motivation in Bess's actions as the founding of a Cavendish dynasty through her children from her second marriage. Details of Bess's life are taken from this volume. Bess made four marriages: 1) Robert Barley, c. 1543 (d. 1544); 2) Sir William Cavendish, the father of her eight children (six of whom survived), 1547 (d. 1557); 3) Sir William St Loe, by 1560 (d. 1565); 4) George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, by 1567 (d. 1590).

² Two studies have treated the textile collection in depth. Santina Levey's *An Elizabethan Inheritance* sets the collection in the context of Bess's life, and Anthony Wells-Cole devotes Chapter 15 of his study on Elizabethan and Jacobean design sources, *Art and Decoration*, to the embroideries of Hardwick. Santina Levey and Peter Thornton's *Of Household Stuff: The 1601 Inventories of Bess of Hardwick* (London: National Trust, 2001) reproduces the three inventories made for testamentary purposes. The publication of Santina Levey's catalogue raisonné of the Hardwick textiles is expected in 2004. Durant's *Bess of Hardwick* is still the principal biography. Bess of Hardwick's architectural



Fig. B.1 Follower of Hans Eworth: Bess of Hardwick as Lady Cavendish (Hardwick Hall)



Fig. B.2 Robert Smythson for Bess of Hardwick, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire

sheer quantity of textiles at Hardwick requires a radical selection of material to treat here. My interest is that part of Bess's colossal artistic programme which was created in-house: the needlework hangings, cushions and table carpets for which her embroiderers drew the designs, and which she and her servants stitched, together with Mary Stuart while they were on cordial terms. Other kinds of textiles, and applied arts such as portraiture, architecture, plasterwork and furniture, will help me to read and interpret these needlework texts.

The survey conducted in the previous chapter of contexts within which Elizabethan and Jacobean needlework was valued provides a practical framework within which to understand the needlework of Bess of Hardwick. The first part of this case study will set Bess of Hardwick's needlework in this contextual framework. A consideration of the impact that the arrival of Mary Stuart had upon Bess's developing personal iconography will then open the way for a close reading of Bess's iconographical programme in the second part of this chapter.

Bess of Hardwick's houses and their furnishings formed the central axis of her testamentary provision. 'Yt hath pleased god', she recorded,

to give me leave to undertake and performe some buildinges at my houses at Chatesworthe, hardwicke and oldcoates [...] and to obtayne some plate bedding hangings and other furniture of household stuffe the which I gretlie desire should be well preserved and contynuede at my said houses for the better furnishing thereof.³

Bess of Hardwick writes of her houses and their textiles in the language of display. The

programmes are discussed in Durant, and in Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983).

³ PRO, Probate II/III, fols. 188-92, cited in Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 6.

houses are, *impresa*-like, ‘undertakings’, with all the notions of embodying elite status and personage the word suggests. Bess unintentionally (though accurately) directs us to read her houses as ‘performative’ spaces, in which the articles of ‘household stuffe’ are the properties. The social and economic worth of the family is both resident in and encoded by luxury textiles, so that textiles such as the Virtues hangings both constitute part of the family wealth and display it, pinpointing the family’s place in the social hierarchy. Bess presents the accumulation of property as sanctioned by divine will. Here in highly concentrated form is the early modern understanding of the Aristotelian doctrine discussed above: the right of the elite to rule, and their inborn faculty to do so virtuously. The outward sign of this inalienable right is their wealth, conspicuously displayed in the buildings they may ‘undertake and performe’ and in the luxury goods they may ‘obtaine’. Bess’s understanding of her and her family’s place in the social hierarchy is implicit in the way she balances performance of the magnificence expected of her estate with performance of the elite virtue of husbandry: it was noted above how although she ‘wolde not have any superfleuetè or waste of any thyng,’ she ‘wolde [...] have [...] that whyche ys nedefoulle and nesesary.’⁴ In the Aristotelian optic, magnificent display is felt by the elite to be ‘needful and necessary’.

The surviving furnishings are evidence of the policy of steady accumulation and careful husbandry that Bess implemented. Her testament charges her heirs with continuing the elite duty of husbandry in perpetuity: none of the house furnishings was to leave the family by ‘will, gifte or other devise to any other person or persons’, but rather her heirs were to safeguard their inheritance, having

speciall care and regard to p’serve the same from all manner of wett,
mothe and other hurte or spoyle thereofe and to leave them so preserved

⁴ Bess of Hardwick, Lady Cavendish to Francis Whitfield, 1552, see above, p. 94.

to contynewe at the sayed several houses.⁵

In stating that she had ‘obtained’ her goods, and in exhorting her heirs to ‘preserve’ them, Bess claimed that she had acted as an independent authority with the virtues of both men and women. According to Thomas Elyot’s enlightened apologist Candidus, in his 1540 *Defence of Good Women* (a source for Bess’s conception of Zenobia, whom she incorporated into her personal textile mythmaking), ‘a Man’s nature is suited to “preparynge”, the acquisition of goods, the woman’s to “kepyng”, their conservation’.⁶ Bess herself had excelled in preservation and continuance, but also in obtaining and acquisition, and indeed, was entirely more successful in these enterprises than her husband Shrewsbury.

The Shrewsbury lawsuit over the Virtues hangings sought effectively to untangle the initials ‘G. E. S.’ superimposed in monogram in a border above each hanging, to demarcate the property-owning woman within a marriage as separate from her husband. The clear division of property was one of the reasons that Bess succeeded in building her fortune at the same time that her fourth husband the Earl of Shrewsbury, was losing his, his resources (mental and emotional, as well as financial) drained by the strain of guarding the Scots Queen. Land and property was bought in the name of Bess’ Cavendish sons William and Charles, with a life interest retained for Bess, which effectively separated her own personal property from being subsumed into her husband’s estate. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Bess tapped Shrewsbury’s finances, she kept her interests focused clearly upon the growth of her own estates and upon the future wealth of her own children. The dispute over the

⁵ PRO, Probate II/III/ fols. 188-92, cited in Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 6.

⁶ Thomas Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* (London: Berthelet, 1545), sig. D1

hangings, for example, hinged upon a 1572 Deed of Gift by which the straitened Shrewsbury signed over to Bess's lifetime control and thence to William and Charles Cavendish the Cavendish estates which Bess brought to the marriage (including Chatsworth), in return for the writing off of 'great Somes of money whych he the said Earle Standeth Chargeable to pay as well to the yonger chyldren of the said Countesse as also for the debts of the said Countyesse and for dyvers other weighty Consyderations'.⁷ The 'great Somes' of ready cash were in all likelihood a settlement which the Earl was bound, under his marriage agreement with Bess, to pay first to William on the attainment of his twenty-first birthday at the end of that year, and again to Charles the following year. Despite Bess's careful legal documentation of their arrangements, Shrewsbury still maintained that Bess was a swindler and a spendthrift. Significantly, he used a textile metaphor to accuse Bess of bleeding his wealth dry: at the time of the lawsuit he wrote to her reproaching her for never having 'esteemed how largely you cut quarters out of my cloth'.⁸

Whilst effectively defying Shrewsbury by retaining control over her own property and increasing it, and by assuming the control over the acquisition of goods which was traditionally the preserve of men, Bess developed a powerful iconographical programme in her textiles which envisaged her simultaneously as virtuous, faithful wife and virtuous, faithful widow. It is significant that the Hardwick hangings of the Virtues, the site of a wife's defiance of her husband and her claims of legal ownership in her own

⁷ Cited in Durant, p. 77. Durant proposes that these considerations, and the payments of Bess's debts (which must have preceded the Shrewsbury marriage), must have been written into their marriage settlement. At a time when deposit banks were non-existent, the lack of ready money was an eternal problem for the Earl, and indeed for the Countess too, even later in her life when her wealth was secured. Bess claimed that at the time of the deed of gift the hangings had been part of the Chatsworth furnishings, and so had been included in the Cavendish settlement.

⁸ Endorsed 5 August 1586, HMC *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, III, p. 164.

right, should simultaneously be the site where archetypal female virtue is claimed. But it is also fitting that these hangings should assert, amongst other things, the characteristics of Zenobia, the widow queen who claimed for herself the masculine virtues necessary successfully to govern.

The arrival of Mary Queen of Scots in the Shrewsbury household in 1569 had been a turning point in the way Bess of Hardwick assembled her personal iconography. Bess had been married for two years to the Earl of Shrewsbury following the death of her third husband, Sir William St Loe. From Mary Stuart's arrival until around 1574 the two women were on excellent terms. Although initially forbidden to see the Scots Queen (the Countess had, with her second husband Sir William Cavendish, expediently become Catholic for the duration of Mary Tudor's reign), Bess soon started to spend part of each day with Mary. Until relations between them began to cool in the mid 1570s, they appear to have invested a great deal of time in joint needlework projects.⁹

A report dated 13 March 1569 from Shrewsbury to Cecil records the collaboration. Mary Stuart 'continues daily to resort to my wife's chamber, where with the Lady Leviston and M^{rs} Seton, she sits working with the needle, wherein she much delights, and devising works'.¹⁰ The report not only implies companionship and social intercourse; the scene Shrewsbury describes is intended to allay fears of subversive political activity. The topos of the embroidering woman indicates, axiomatically, one who is fruitfully and innocently employed. Shrewsbury is clearly anxious to reassure

⁹ An initial stumbling block was the secret marriage of Bess's daughter Elizabeth to Charles Stuart (and Mary Stuart's brother-in-law, through her marriage to Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley). Charles's mother was Margaret Stuart, Countess of Lennox, Henry VIII's niece. The child of this marriage, Arbella Stuart, had a very strong claim to succeed Elizabeth to the throne of England. For a discussion of Arbella Stuart's needlework, see Chapter Three of this study.

¹⁰ Letter dated 13 March 1569 from Shrewsbury to Cecil, *CSP Scots*, II, pp. 632-33.

Cecil that Bess was not being won over to the Scots Queen's side, and the needlework activity is presented as evidence of this, as the women converse only of 'indifferent trifling matters, without any sign of secret dealing or practice I assure you. Of which resort, though I think there can be not danger, but rather more surety, yet if her majesty be not pleased, I will make such restraint as she orders'.¹¹ The image of the virtuous embroidering woman was one that Bess was to cultivate in the following decade, as we shall see.

A set of extant hangings date from this period of collaboration (fig. B.3). The so-called 'Oxburgh hangings' consist of a number of individual panels arranged and mounted some time early in the seventeenth century on a background of green velvet.¹² Four hangings resulted. Two, the so-called 'Shrewsbury' and 'Cavendish' hangings, were used for the pelmet and curtains of an oak bed dated 1675. A third (the so-called 'Marian' hanging) was kept as a wall-hanging, and a fourth was cut up into its component pieces. The 'Shrewsbury', 'Cavendish' and 'Marian' hangings, the property of the Victoria and Albert Museum and on loan to the National Trust, are now housed at Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk, in a specially darkened room. The fragments of the fourth hanging are currently held in the Victoria and Albert Museum and in the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Small cruciform tent-stitch panels depict a bird, fish or beast and a smaller number of octagonal panels are stitched with an emblematic device and a motto worked around the edge. On each hanging the panels are positioned precisely round a central square panel figuring a more developed emblem. The emblematic nature of these larger panels gives a key to scrutinising the cruciform panels for similar

¹¹ Although the needlework reassured Shrewsbury, others were more suspicious of it. C.f. the comments of Elizabeth's envoy Nicholas White, above, p. 62.

¹² For a theory of their history after Mary Stuart's death, see Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots* (Carlton, Bedford: Bean, 1986), pp. 102-03.



Fig. B.3 Bess of Harwick and Mary, Queen of Scots: Oxburgh Hangings in the King's Room at Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk (now displayed in darkened anteroom)

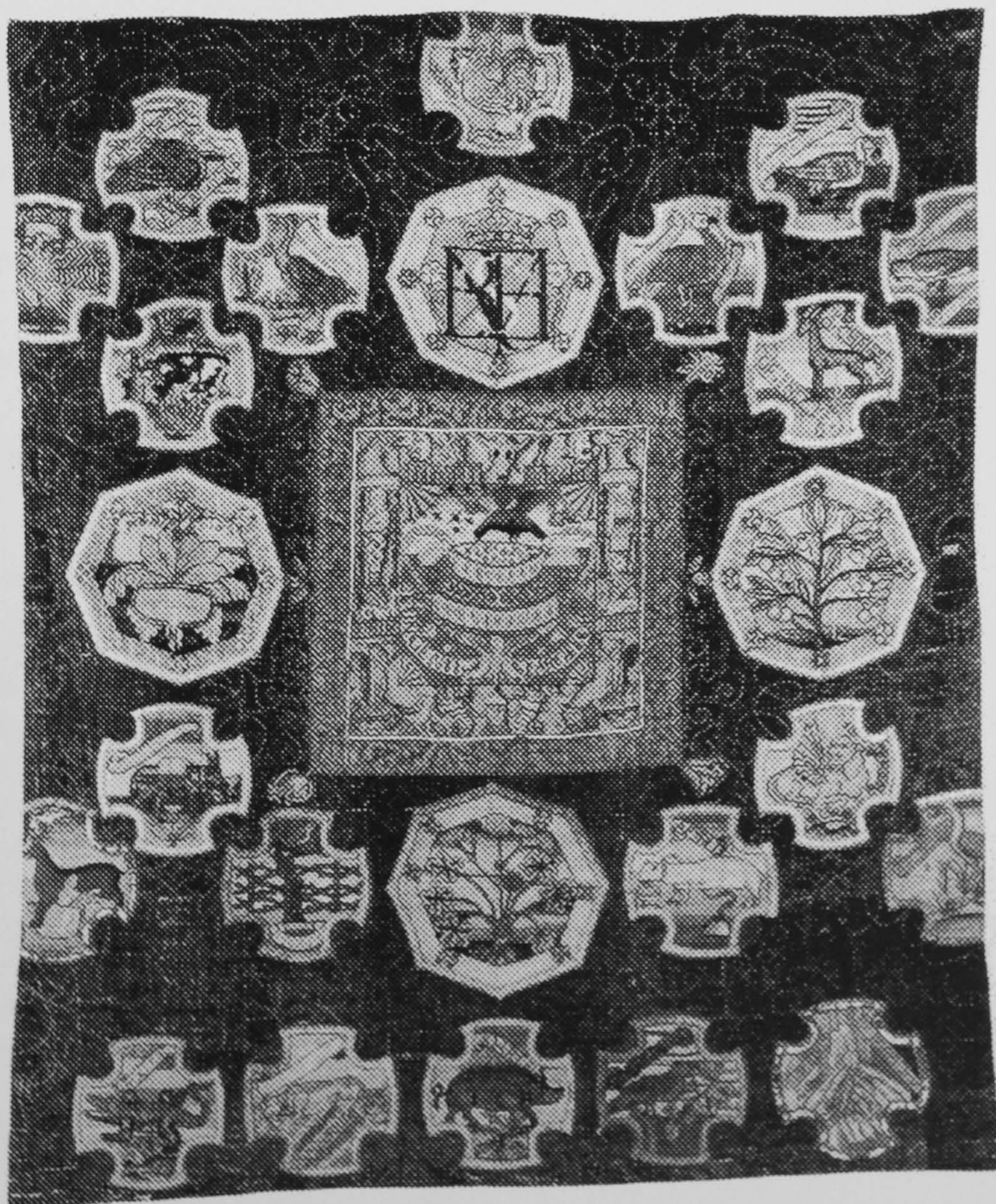


Fig. B.4 Shrewsbury Hanging

significance: although they lack explicatory mottoes they are nonetheless invested with a powerful emblematic function.¹³ Some of the panels bear one of Mary's several monograms and ciphers, which strongly suggest that they were pieces worked by herself and which may have had a significance to be particularly stressed or underlined. The 'Marian' hanging is so-called for the density of 'signed' panels: eighteen out of a total of twenty-eight of the cruciform birds and beasts display either a monogram or a cipher.

The 'Shrewsbury' and 'Cavendish' hangings are assembled according to the same principles, and take their names from the central, square emblematic panels (fig. B.4). The central emblem on the Shrewsbury' hanging is adapted from Claude Paradin's *Devises Heroiques*, an Aesopian raven filling an urn with stones to raise the water level within so that the raven may drink, illustrating the motto *Ingenii largitor*, 'bestower of wit' (figs. B.5-6).¹⁴ The design incorporates the monograms 'G. S.' and 'E. S.', for George and Elizabeth Shrewsbury. The 'Cavendish' panel (discussed in greater detail below) shows an emblem of tears falling on quicklime, with the motto *Extinctam lachrimae testantur vivere flammam* ('tears witness that the quenched flame lives'), and the monograms 'E. S.' and 'W. C.' (for William Cavendish).

¹³ I have explored the iconography of the Oxburgh hangings in detail insofar as they relate to the iconographical programmes of Mary Stuart in 'Embroidering a Royal Identity'. For a discussion of how the panels relate specifically to the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth I, see the case study to Chapter Three below. The earliest study of the Oxburgh hangings was Francis de Zulueta's meticulous monograph *Embroideries by Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Talbot at Oxburgh Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923). Margaret Swain's *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots* is a lavishly illustrated and useful volume which considers the Oxburgh panels as the culmination of Mary's documented needlework. Susan Frye has touched briefly upon the panels in 'Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot and Seventeenth-Century Anonymous Needleworkers', in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 163-82 (p. 170). A forthcoming volume by Frye is to include a more extended discussion of Mary Stuart's needlework. Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass offer a brief reading of some aspects of the Oxburgh hangings in Chapter 6 of *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, pp. 154-56. Jennifer Summit produces a critique of Mary's 'Norfolk panel' (centrepiece to the Marian Hanging) in "'The Arte of a Ladies Penne'", pp. 419-21. The Oxburgh Hangings are discussed below pp. 136-39, 176-83, 361-68 and 371-82.

¹⁴ Paradin, p. 141.

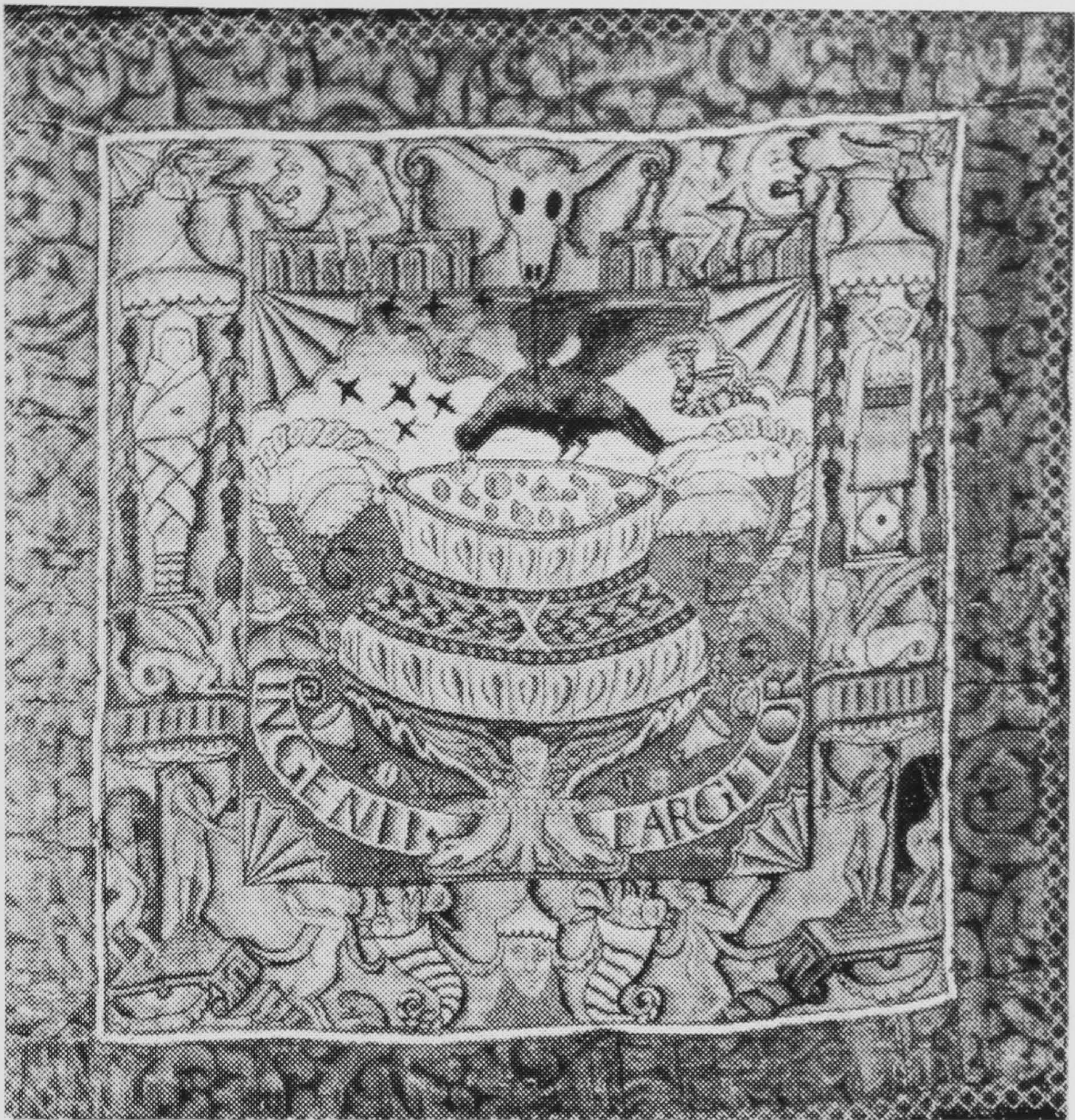


Fig. B.5 Central panel of Shrewsbury Hanging showing ‘*Ingenij largitor*’ emblem adapted from Claude Paradin’s *Devises Heroiques*.

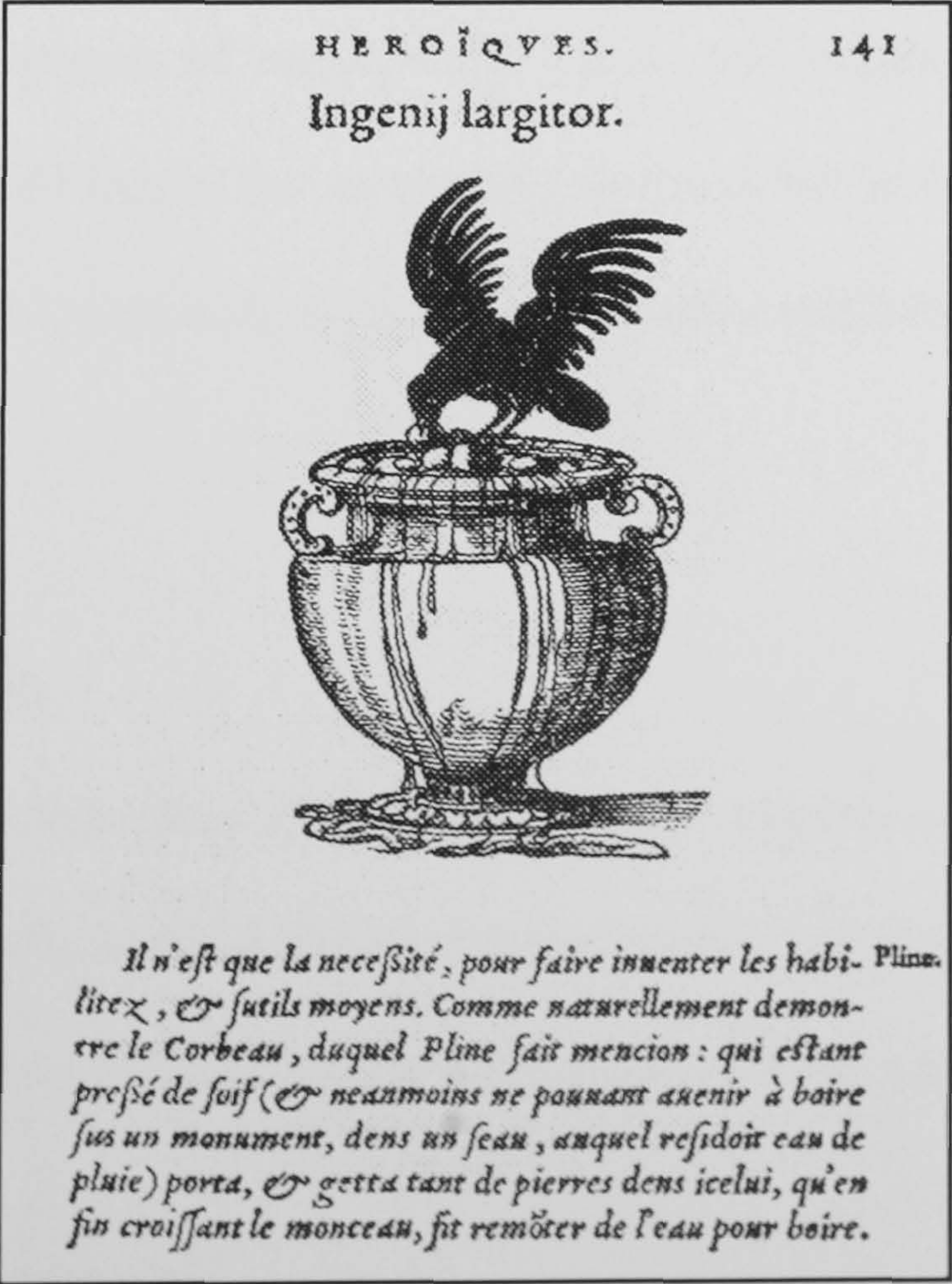


Fig. B.6 ‘*Ingenij largitor*’ emblem from Claude Paradin, *Devises Heroiques*, Lyons, 1557

In the similarities of conception and design the three central panels are evidence in themselves of the two women working together on needlework designs, 'devising workes', as Shrewsbury put it. More than this, though, they are evidence of the impact that Mary Stuart had on Bess of Hardwick's creation of iconographical programmes in needlework.¹⁵ It is clear that the designs for Bess's panels developed out of discussions with Mary: the emblem centrepiece for the Cavendish hanging, was the impresa used by Catherine de' Medici, mother of Mary's first husband, François II, and it is unlikely that Bess could have known about it other than through Mary. The emblem was originally used by the widowed Catherine to commemorate her husband, Henri II. But it was also one element of a much more extensive programme implemented by Catherine of self-promotion as powerful widow, and it is this aspect of the emblem's former application that suggests that the Cavendish panel (dated 1570, the second year of Stuart's captivity), and its companion piece the Shrewsbury panel, were the start of something more than isolated pieces of needlework. Bess had begun to put together a visual vocabulary that would figure her as morally irreproachable wife and faithful widow, a virtuous and powerful matriarch at the head of a well-established dynasty.

I: The Virtuous Wife

The visitor received into Bess of Hardwick's state apartments in the sixteenth century would have read in the surface detail of their textiles, paintings, plasterwork and other furnishings statements of Bess's elite personage and her publicly-fashioned persona.

¹⁵ Margaret Ellis has studied the intellectual contribution of Mary Stuart to the production of the Virtues hangings, in 'The Hardwick Hall Hangings: An Unusual Collaboration in English Sixteenth Century Embroidery', in *Renaissance Studies*, 10 (1996), 280-95.

One key technique for bodying forth status and persona with an iconographical vocabulary was exemplarity. Thus the hanging cited in the Introduction to this thesis claimed for Bess Lucretia's chastity, and her liberality which the beholder in the Withdrawing Chamber was experiencing in the form of Bess's hospitality. The famous women whom Bess portrayed in the rest of the set assert for Bess a range of other virtues: she claims Artemisia's Constancy and Piety, Penelope's Patience and Perseverance, Zenobia's Magnanimity and Prudence and Cleopatra's Fortitude and Justice (a hanging which has not survived). As Margaret Ellis points out in her study of the hangings, the traditional format for portraying virtues was frequently 'forward-facing iconic figures, often accompanied by human exemplars [...]'. By contrast, the emphasis is reversed in the *Virtues and Heroines* hangings, and the two-thirds life-size heroines (the human representatives) are the frontal hieratic figures in the central position. The two secondary, and smaller figures in the side arches are the virtues possessed by the heroine'.¹⁶ Ellis suggests that 'the practical values of the virtues were more important for Bess than abstract concepts, in turn a reflection of sixteenth-century humanist values'.

I would further argue that by emphasising the human figure rather than the virtues Bess asserted a stronger identification with the individual heroines. Bess tropes herself as exemplary wife through Lucretia and Penelope, a wife, moreover, whose particular virtues are in their histories expressed in their relationship to textile work. The seeds of Bess's self-promotion as Lucretia may have been sown more than a decade before the hangings were commissioned, since it was the name chosen for a daughter who was born and died in 1557, her last child from her marriage to Sir William Cavendish. The

¹⁶ Ellis, 'The Hardwick Hall Hangings', p. 285.

classical source for Lucretia's story is Livy's *History of Rome*. Sextus Tarquinius was hosting a party at which Collatinus and others were arguing whose wife was the most virtuous. Springing surprise visits on each of the women including Collatinus's wife Lucretia,

they found Lucretia very differently employed from the king's daughters-in-law, whom they had seen passing their time in feasting and luxury with their acquaintances. She was sitting at her wool work in the hall, late at night, with her, maids busy round her. The palm in this competition of wifely virtue was awarded to Lucretia.¹⁷

Sextus Tarquinius returned to Collatinus's house, consumed by ungovernable passion for Lucretia. After a warm and courteous reception by his hostess, he raped her in her chamber in the middle of the night. Lucretia killed herself rather than live with the shame. In Livy's account Lucretia's woolworking – and her suicide – is an index of her chastity, and her reception of Tarquinius displays liberality, interpreted in an early modern domestic context as hospitality.¹⁸ By displaying Lucretia in her hangings, Bess claimed the archetypal virtues of the early modern wife based on the Roman model: chastity (fidelity, in our terms) and hospitality.¹⁹

Chaucer's Lucretia follows Livy in his portrayal of the heroine, who is discovered by her returning husband in her chamber

Disheuele, for n[o] malice she ne thought,

¹⁷ Titus Livius, *The History of Rome: Vol I*, ed. by Ernest Rhys, trans. by Rev. Canon Roberts (New York: Dutton, 1912), 1.57.

¹⁸ 'In the earlier ages of Greece and Rome, it was the duty of the matron, assisted by her daughters, to weave clothing for her husband and sons. Thus Lucretia is depicted by Ovid, in the Second Book of the *Fasti*, as weaving a cloak for her husband (2.741-42); see also Livy 1.57-59. In the *Ion* of Euripides, Creusa proves herself to be the mother of Ion by describing the pattern of a shawl which she had made, and in which she had wrapped her infant son (l. 1417). In the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides, Iphigenia recognizes Orestes (l. 812), and in the *Choephoroi* of Aeschylus, Electra also recognizes him (l. 231), by the figured clothing which he wears, and which they had respectively long before woven for him.' (Anon, *Commentary on the Heroides of Ovid*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>).

¹⁹ Bess's persona compares closely with the portrait of Barbara Gamage in Jonson's 'To Penshurst', see above p. 49.

And softe wol [our boke saith] that she wrought
To kepen her fro slouth and idelnesse;
And bad hir seruaunts don her businesse.²⁰

Chaucer develops the ascription of virtue with his explanation of the benefit of Lucretia's textile occupation: it keeps her from deadly sin. His Lucretia also claims an additional virtue of the aristocratic woman, the proper governing of her servants. Shakespeare departs from the classical model in *The Rape of Lucrece* in that his Lucretia is not at work spinning when the visitors arrive. The chastity exhibited by the virtuous occupation of spinning that is the whole point of the Roman history is instead transposed into early modern terms. Wool-working becomes needlework, and, in a more dramatic version of the tale, Lucretia's needle becomes her symbolic front-line defence against her rape. As Tarquin ventures into Lucretia's chamber,

being lighted, by the light he spies
Lucretia's glove, wherein her needle sticks;
He takes it from the rushes where it lies,
And griping it, the needle his finger pricks,
As who should say 'This glove to wanton tricks
Is not inur'd. Return again in haste;
Thou seest our mistress' ornaments are chaste'.²¹

Two decades after Bess commissioned her hanging, Lucretia was being both protected by her needlework and made vulnerable: 'the glove that did not delay him' makes but 'poor forbiddings' (ll. 325, 323). The needlework is envisaged by Shakespeare as a discursive property, emblematic: Lucretia's glove is the embroidered sign which blazons chastity and renders it visible.²²

²⁰ 'Legend of Lucrece', ll. 1720-23, in Geoffrey Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, ed. by Janet Cowan and George Kane, Medieval Texts and Studies, 16 (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1995), p. 267.

²¹ William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), ll. 316-22.

²² 'Material', says Carol Chillington Rutter of Cressida's equally impotent glove, 'becomes the body's proxy' (*Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 112).



Fig. B.7 Detail of Lucretia hanging showing Chastity with sprig of myrtle and unicorn

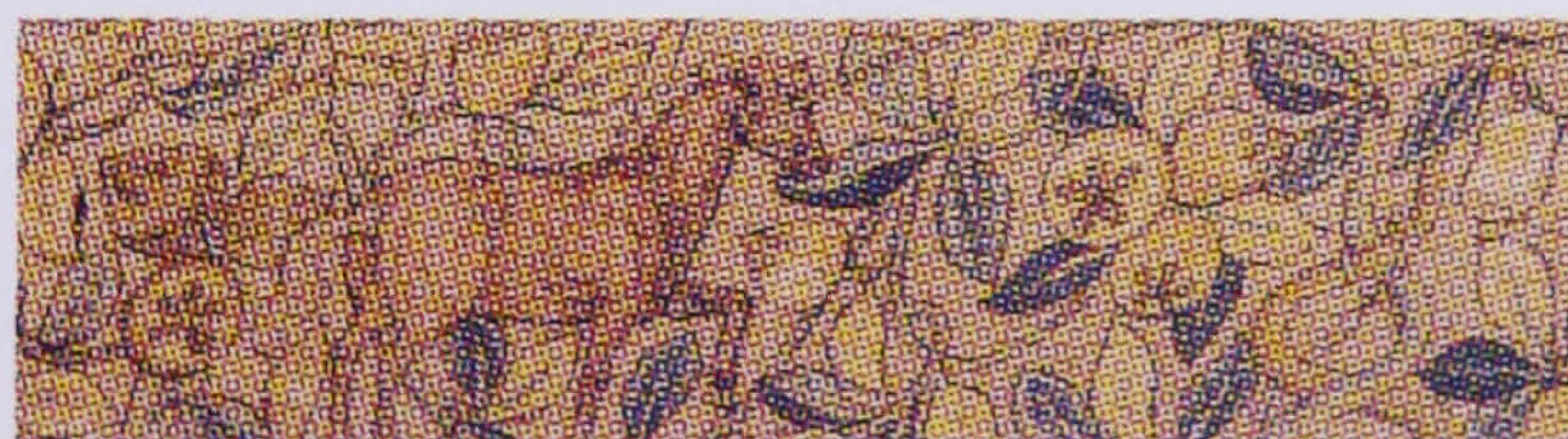


Fig. B.8 Detail of Judgement of Paris table carpet showing unicorn in border (Hardwick Hall)



Fig. B.9 Detail of Story of Tobit table carpet showing myrtle in border (Hardwick Hall)

Bess of Hardwick represented her own and Lucretia's chastity in needlework (fig. B.7) twenty years before Shakespeare demonstrated his familiarity with the power of the embroidered sign to body forth virtuous persona, but the two authors draw on a common understanding of the trope of Lucretia, and both transpose Lucretia's Roman wool-working to a signifier more appropriate to their early modern context. Bess's appliquéd Lucretia is shown conventionally in the act of stabbing herself and not engaged in needlework, but Bess lays stress on the importance of women's work as signifier in two ways: Lucretia's chastity is both demonstrated in the figure of Chastity personified that accompanies her, and also in the textile medium of the whole. In addition, the appliquéd Chastity is rendered with attributes of a sprig of myrtle and a unicorn, and both of these symbolic representations of chastity are elements in the iconographical vocabulary which Bess employs elsewhere in her needlework. The unicorn, for example, is found in the border of the 1574 table carpet showing 'The Judgement of Paris', and myrtle is included in the border of 'The Story of Tobit' table carpet, dated 1579 (figs. B.8-9). The Judgement of Paris carpet may emphasise the goddess Athene's chastity in an unusual detail of the border foliage (fig. B.10), which is held together with lengths of fabric twisted into the form of a girdle, suggestive of Athene's *cestus*, or girdle. Chastity is further represented in emblematic form by a panel on the Shrewsbury hanging showing a bird called a 'Porphyry', probably also worked some time in the early 1570s (fig. B.11). 'The bird porphyrio', wrote Alciato of his emblem no. 47,

if it saw that the lady who was both the wife and woman of its master strayed foolishly, would cry from sadness, and readily would die because of such a misdeed. The reason for this is hidden in nature. We see, however, that this bird cares for chastity because it lived in chastity'²³

²³ Emblem no. 47, *Andreas Alciatus: Emblems in Translation*, ed. by P. M. Daly, Index Emblematicus, II



Fig. B.10 Detail of Judgement of Paris table carpet showing *cestus*-like fabric tying foliage branches together in border



Fig. B.11 Detail of Shrewsbury Hanging showing 'Porphyry' panel, cut, on right hand side

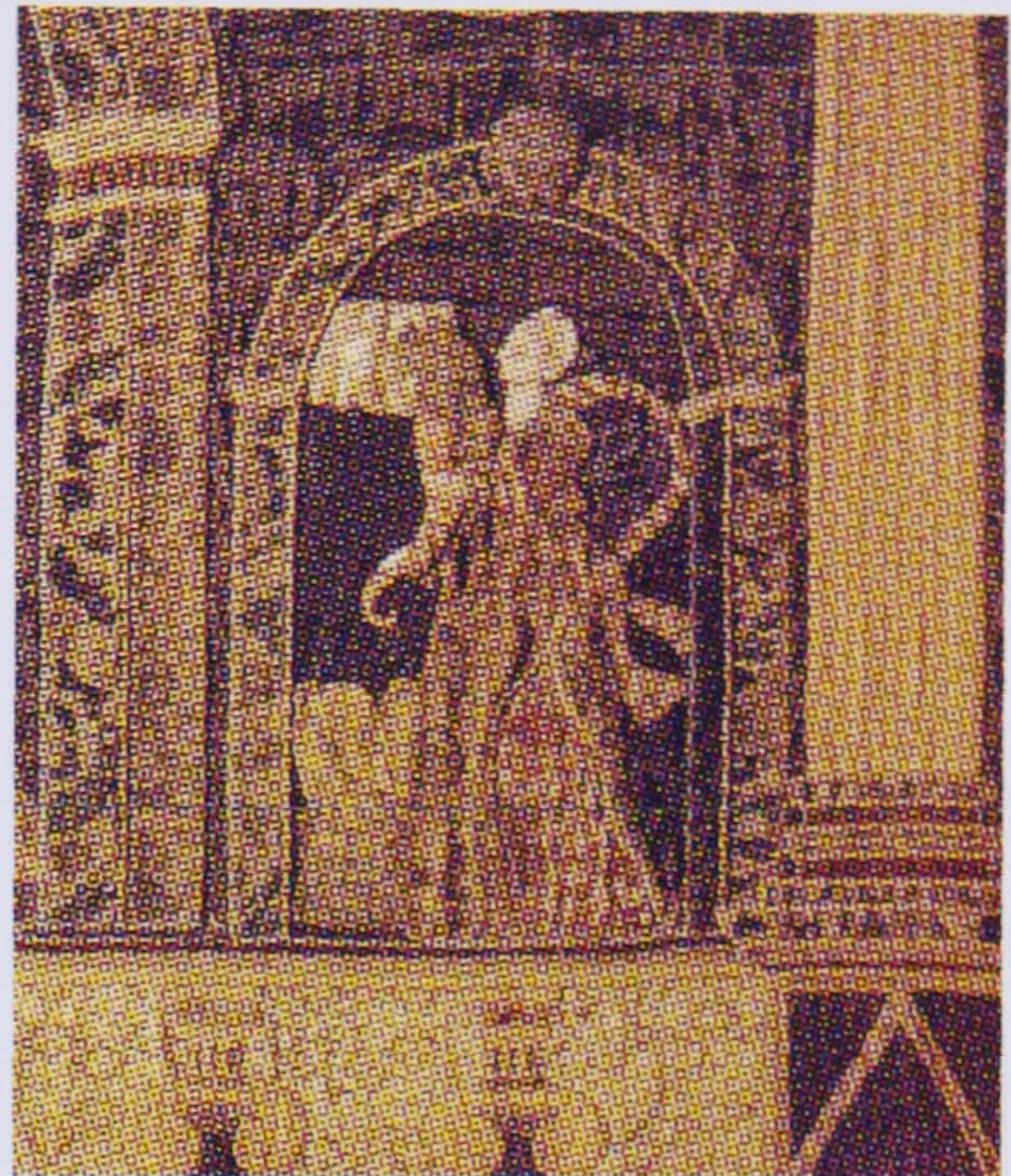


Fig. B.12 Detail of Lucretia hanging showing Liberality with cornucopia

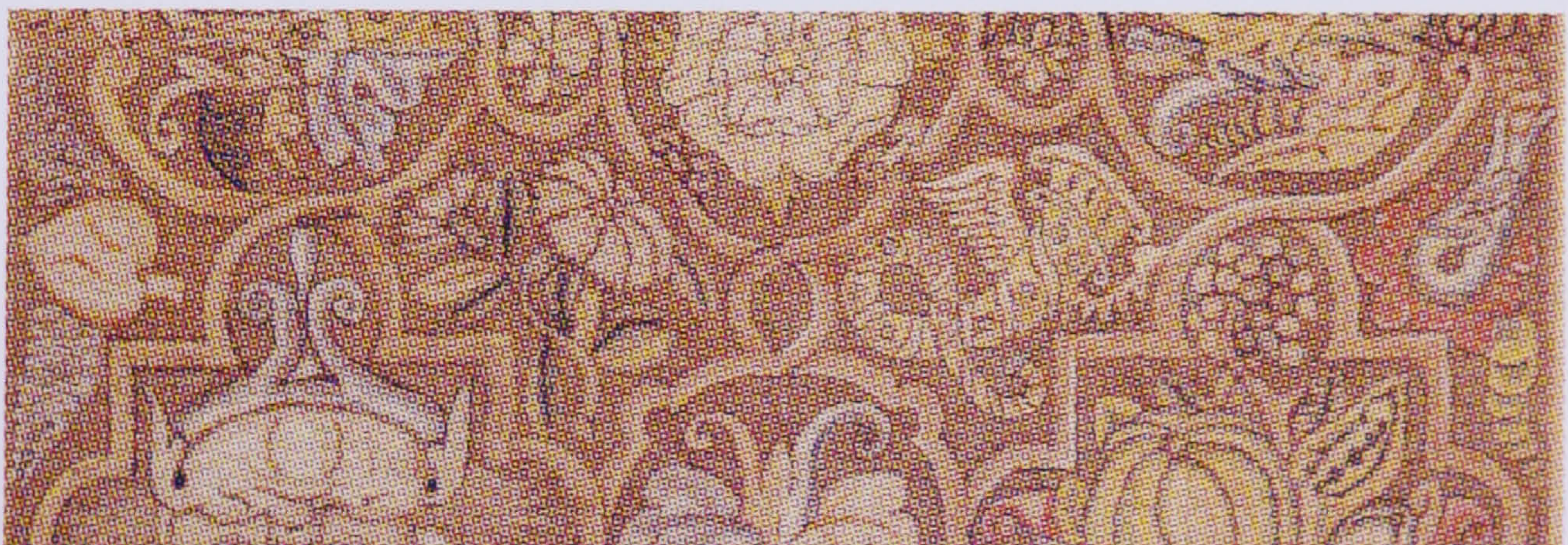


Fig. B.13 Detail of Rose with Antics table carpet showing winged cornucopia, carnation and winged heart (Hardwick Hall)

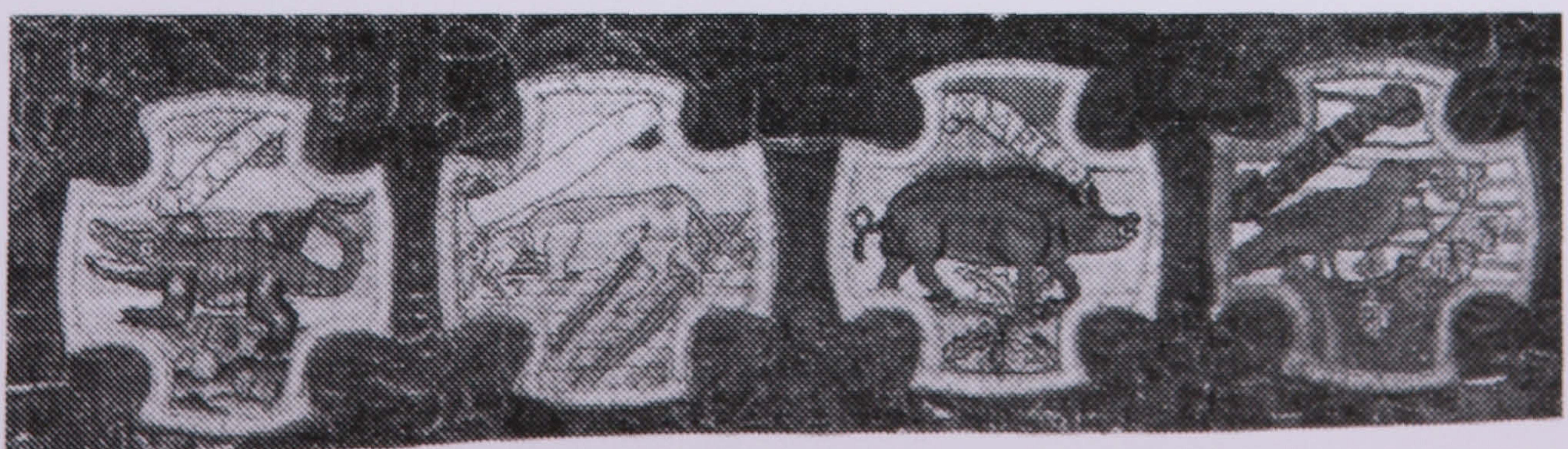


Fig. B.14 Detail of Shrewsbury hanging showing 'Crocodil' panel, left

Liberality, or hospitality, is represented in the Lucretia hanging by a cornucopia, an emblem which appears on another needlework table carpet of 'A Rose and Antickes' (figs. B.12-13). Here, the winged cornucopia is associated with a needleworked carnation and a winged heart, emblems of marital fidelity and love, and with helmets and arms, which may denote the armour of virtue, also represented by the 'crocodil' panel on the Cavendish hanging (fig. B.14).²⁴

Lucretia and the virtues she embodied were clearly important strands of Bess's personal iconography. It has recently been convincingly argued by Alastair Laing that a painting attributed to John Balehouse dated 1570 and usually described as 'The Return of Ulysses to Penelope' (fig. B.15) may in fact depict the story of Lucretia, as Anthony Wells-Cole explains:

the supposed Ulysses is shown not as a beggar but as a gentleman with a train of companions (the suitors would have been inside the parlour), and that the lady of the house and her maid are weaving by night (when Penelope *unravelled* her work). He concludes that the subject is actually 'Tarquinius Collatinus [sic] Returning to Lucretia' and indicates that Bess had already begun by 1570 to represent herself to the frequently absent Earl of Shrewsbury as the virtuous wife diligently working at her embroideries.²⁵

If the picture does indeed show the story of Lucretia it is an unusual conception of the figure in art. In all the paintings reproduced in Ian Donaldson's survey of the figure of Lucretia, *Rapes of Lucrece: A Myth and its Transformation*, Lucretia is shown without

(Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

²⁴ Wither's emblem of a crocodile in 1635 recorded that '*True Vertue is a Coate of Maile, | 'Gainst which, no weapons can prevaile*' (George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Modern* (1635), Renaissance English Text Society, 5-6 (London: Taunton, 1635; repr. Columbia, SC: University of Columbia Press, 1975), p. 112).

²⁵ Notes by Anthony Wells-Cole to exhibit number 52 in the exhibition catalogue *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, ed. by Karen Hearn ([London]: Tate Publishing, 1995), p. 101.

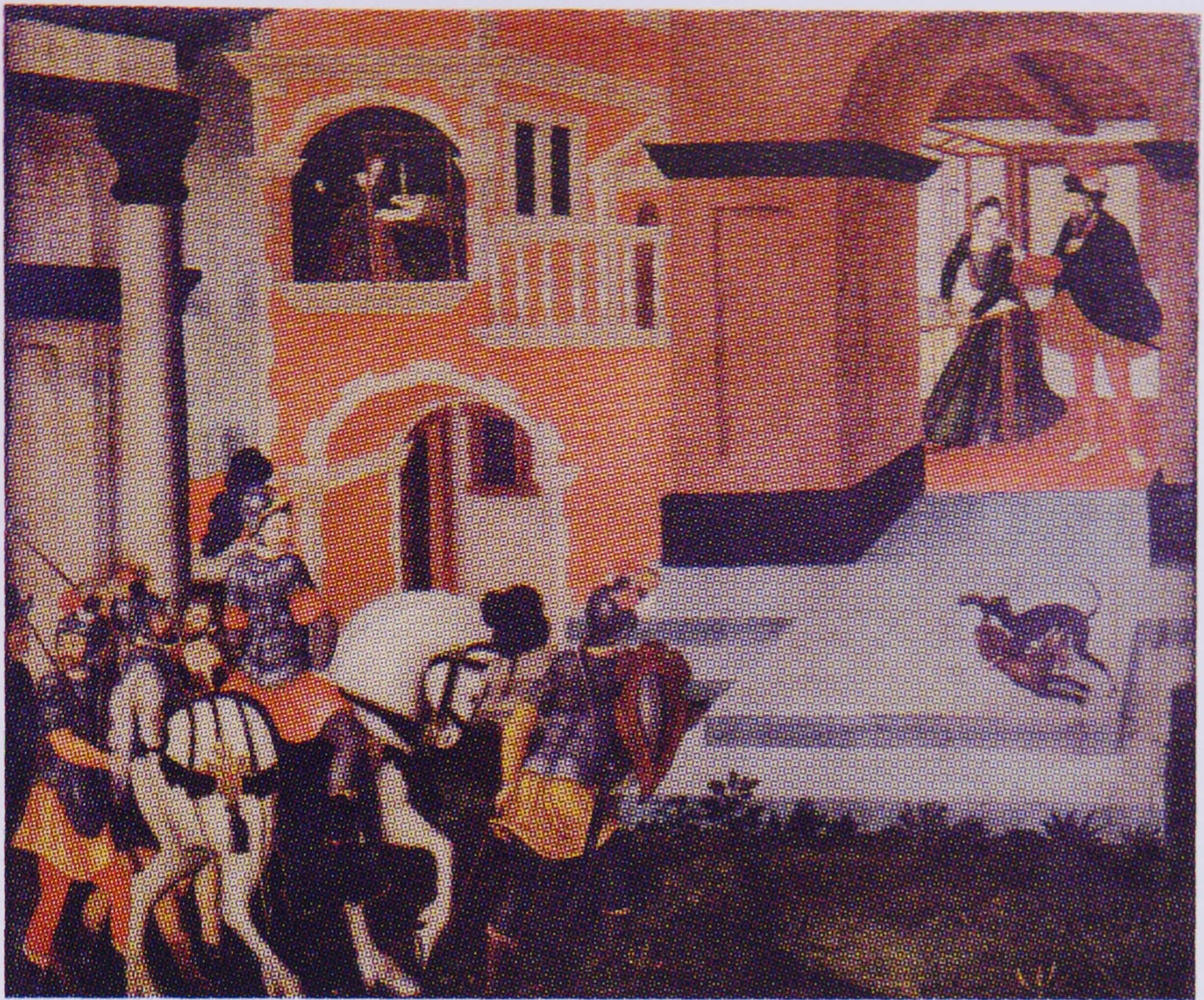


Fig. B.15 attr. John Balechouse, *The Return of Ulysses to Penelope*. Oil on canvas, 1570 (Hardwick Hall)

exception in the act of suicide, and not once at work at the loom.²⁶ Balehouse's Lucretia (if it is indeed she) draws more on literary than on artistic sources, and supports the emphasis on Lucretia's exemplary qualities as chaste and hospitable housewife in Bess's needlework.

Alternatively, if Balehouse's picture does in fact portray Penelope, it would feed just as well into Bess's developing iconography of the faithful wife, since Penelope figures prominently in two major textile works at Hardwick Hall. She is joint protagonist of the final (and largest) piece of a series of Brussels tapestries of the Story of Ulysses commissioned by Bess for the High Great Chamber in 1587. In the tapestry headed '*Animi magnitudine multa perpessus tandem a | Pudica uxore exceptitur non sine notice [sic] signo*', Penelope is placed at the centre of the composition embracing Ulysses.²⁷ In the multiple scenes from Homer's *Odyssey* narrated within the crowded composition, Penelope's textile activity is accented. She is shown weaving a shroud for Odysseus's father Laertes in an episode from Book XIX:

For now nere drew
Laertes' death, and on my hand did lye
His funerall Robe, whose end (being now so nye)
I must not leave, and lose so much begun —
The rather, lest the Greeke Dames might bewun
To taxe mine honour, if a man so great
Should greet his grave without his winding sheet.
[...] whatsoever all the day had done
I made the night helpe to undo againe,

²⁶ Ian Donaldson, *Rapes of Lucrece: A Myth and its Transformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

²⁷ 'Enduring with great magnitude of spirit, however, he freed himself from his modest wife not without a sign of recognition'. For a study of the tapestry cycle see Marcel Roethlisberger, 'The Ulysses Tapestries at Hardwick Hall', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 79 (1972), 111-25.

[...] Three yeares my wit secur'd me undiscern'd (ll. 201, 209, 212).²⁸

Like Lucretia's needle- or woolwork, weaving presents Penelope as the seemly housewife carrying out the textile duties expected of her.²⁹ And Penelope's 'wit' has ensured that her woven undertaking has 'secur'd' three years of chaste fidelity to her husband in the face of the suitors' harassment. Weaving is figured as the act which constitutes Penelope's public identity, in relation to which she imagines herself becoming the subject of conversation in the neighbourhood. In such a conversation the woven shroud would participate as blazon both of domestic virtue and of chastity.

Penelope also appears as one of the heroines of the Virtues hangings, her hand resting emphatically on a roll of woven cloth (fig. B.16). Like the gloves worked by Shakespeare's Lucretia, Penelope's cloth, represented symbolically in the amulet that Penelope wears around her neck, constitutes her only defence against the attentions of the suitors. She is flanked by Patience, with her arms folded and a lamb at her side, and Perseverance, pictured with a phoenix in flames. Bess uses Penelope as exemplum in the same way as she uses Lucretia. Her claim to their virtues is strengthened by the implications of framing in needlework the histories of their virtue-inspired and virtue-defending textile work.

Durant suggests that although 'the forbearance and patience of Penelope and the constancy of Artemisia were virtues Bess tried to emulate', the Virtues panels were planned as iconographical 'compliments to Queen Elizabeth', with their emphasis on

²⁸ Chapman's Homer: *The Illiad, The Odyssey and The Lesser Homerica*, ed. by Allardyce Nicoll, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), II: *The Odyssey and the Lesser Homerica*, p. 279.

²⁹ Roy Strong has suggested that Bess used the Penelope hanging and the Balehouse painting (which has now been shown to be of Lucretia and Tarquinius) to present herself in the persona of the virtuous wife and widow, in *The English Icon*, p. 41.



Fig. B.16 Detail of Penelope hanging showing Penelope with hand resting on roll of cloth

justice, liberality, charity and wisdom.³⁰ There is no reason why Bess's iconographical programme might not encompass both interpretations. Whilst the plaster frieze of Diana in the High Great Chamber, and the 'E. S.'-monogrammed long cushion of Actaeon and Diana recall Elizabeth I's personal iconography, they also generally support Bess's claims to chastity (figs. B.17-18). Elsewhere in the house emblems merge the two women, for instance in the intarsiated 'Eglantine table' in the High Great Chamber on which a cartouche frames a couplet promising Cavendish and Hardwick loyalty to Elizabeth constructed around the conceit of Elizabeth-as-Eglantine and the Cavendish and Hardwick heraldic stag: 'the redolent sme[ll] of æglentyne | we stagges exavet [exalt] to the deveyne'.³¹ Margaret Ellis argues that Faith, a figure from another set of Virtues hangings on which each of the cardinal virtues is represented with its contrary vice, 'represents Elizabeth as the supreme Governor of the Church of England' (fig. B.19), and that 'the source for this depiction of Faith is probably the figure of Elizabeth I in the 1569 painting entitled *Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses*' (fig. M.5), a reworking of the Judgement of Paris myth.³²

³⁰ Durant, p. 67. Ellis agrees, 'The Hardwick Hall Hangings', p. 285.

³¹ The stag appears as a heraldic animal on both the Hardwick and Cavendish family crests (see Thomas Robson, *The British Herald; or, Cabinet of Armorial Bearings*, 3 vols (Sunderland: Turner & Marwood, 1820), II, under entries for 'Hardwyke' and Cavendish). The Eglantyne table was probably made to celebrate Bess's marriage to Shrewsbury (Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, p. 250).

³² Ellis, 'The Hardwick Hall Hangings', pp. 291-92. If Ellis's theory is correct, then Elizabeth-as-Justice, the companion of Cleopatra, may also be represented emblematically as *Virgo spiciflora* in a panel depicting a cock with three ears of corn which crowns the Shrewsbury hanging (visible in fig. B.26). Frances Yates notes a literary imitation of the classical identification of Virgo with Astrea in Spenser's procession of the months in *The Faerie Queene*: August

led a louely Mayd

Forth by the lilly hand, the which was cround

With eares of come, and full her hand was found;

That was the righteous Virgin (VII.7.37, l. 3).

(*Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 30-32).

A dragon shown in another panel on the Shrewsbury hanging is the traditional protector of virgins (visible in fig. B.11). Another consequence of Ellis's theory is that, if correct, it would confirm that Bess (and thus Mary) had access to information about Elizabeth's picture. This is of importance to the present study in that the case study to Chapter Three focuses on negotiations between Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I for a meeting, which saw the two queens engaged in an iconographical battle expressed in



Fig. B.17 Plaster frieze of Diana, High Great Chamber, Hardwick Hall



Fig. B.18 Long cushion of Actaeon and Diana (Hardwick Hall)



Fig. B.19 Faith from a set of Virtues appliqué hangings
(Hardwick Hall)



Fig. B.20 Table Carpet depicting Judgement of Paris, dated 1570



Fig. B.21 'Wifely fidelity': emblem
191 from Alciato's *Emblemata
Liber*

The Judgement of Paris myth occurs on the Hardwick table carpet dated 1574 (fig. B.20), a major element of Bess's promotion of her persona of virtuous wife. The carpet's central image is a conventional representation of the story of the Judgement of Paris, but with certain significant details which link it to the emblematic representation of wifely fidelity in Alciato's emblem 191 (fig. B.21):

Behold a young woman, who joins right hands with a man; behold how she sits and how a dog plays at her feet. This is the image of fidelity: if the passion of Venus fosters this fidelity, on her left there will be a branch aptly bearing apples.

The table carpet fuses the symbolic elements of the emblem of wifely fidelity with the Judgement of Paris myth. The little dog and the apple tree itself are two details mentioned by Alciato. But of particular importance to the interpretation of this carpet as a statement of Bess's virtues as a wife is the specific joining of Paris and Venus's right hands, in a departure from conventional representations of the myth which tend to portray Paris holding out the apple before Venus has taken it. It may be that this iconographical statement of conjugal vows is connected in some way with the embroidered date 1574, which is placed immediately above the hands jointly holding the apple. Bess's fertility as a wife is emphasised by the portrayal of Venus as Venus Genetrix, with characteristic drapery that both reveals and conceals her form, and associated with an apple. A border detail reinforces the theme of fidelity: the faithful Talbot dog with its characteristic extended tongue appears on the top edge of the border amongst hazel branches. Further, as noted above, the border details of unicorn and *cestus* trope Bess as chaste wife, a message emphasised in the inclusion of a turtledove in the border, also emblematic of chastity.³³ The technique of blazoning Bess's chaste

terms of the Judgement of Paris myth.
³³ Cesare Ripa Perugino, *Iconologia*, ed. by Piero Buscardini (Padua: Tozzi, 1618; repr. Turin: Fogola, 1988), p. 48.

and faithful persona within the Talbot marriage is also used in other needlework and embroidery pieces. A red velvet heraldic cushion, for example, surrounds the Hardwick stag and the initials 'E. S.' with a rigorously symmetrical design of four floral sprigs three of which represent purity (a strawberry), fidelity (carnations) and fruitfulness (bunches of grapes) (fig. B.22).

The persona outlined here is forcefully articulated by the Hardwick textiles. But Bess developed the public image of herself along a second major axis which at first sight appears to problematise her assertions of wifely fidelity to Shrewsbury. Just as powerful are her iconographical statements of being a faithful widow to Sir William Cavendish, the second of her four husbands.

II: The Virtuous Widow

The starting point for an exploration of this element in Bess's iconographical programme is the 'Cavendish' panel (fig. B.23), the centrepiece to the Cavendish Oxburgh hanging. In commemorating William Cavendish it writes Bess as the good widow who keeps alive her husband's memory in the image of the widow's grief. Her emblematised tears witness her sorrow for the symbolically quenched flame of her husband's life: '*Extinctam lachrimae testantur vivere flammam*'. The emblem is bordered by a series of mourning emblems: broken mirrors, severed interlaced cords, falling feathers (a visual pun on *peine*, and *penne*, feathers), a glove cut in two, and a snapped chain. Three intertwined finger-rings symbolise Bess's three widowings. The Hardwick/Cavendish stag and knotted serpents mirror family heraldry in the corners, and the composition is completed by monograms and the embroidered date, 1570.

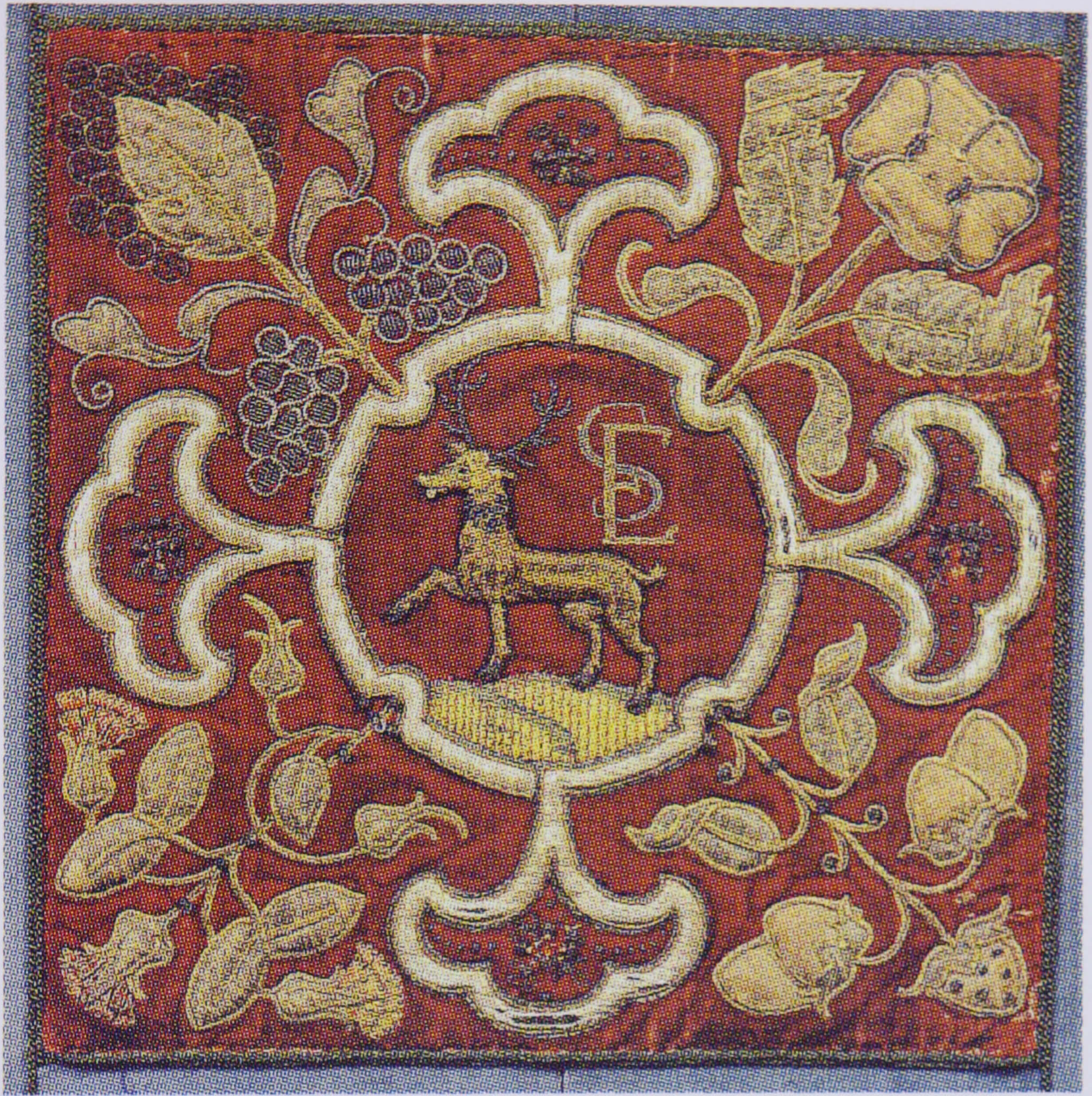


Fig. B.22 Heraldic panel with Hardwick stag and ES monogram. Velvet with applied strapwork and floral sprigs (Hardwick Hall)



Fig. B.23 Central panel of Cavendish Hanging showing '*Extinctam lachrimae testantur vivere flammam*' emblem



Fig. B.24 Antoine Caron: *Les Placets: Artemisia Receiving Petitions*, pen and ink wash (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

The panel poses an intriguing question: how did it serve Bess's interests to resurrect her faithfulness to her Cavendish second marriage during her Shrewsbury fourth marriage in this way? I would suggest that the answer lies in the dynastic ambitions which have been so persuasively argued for Bess by David Durant in his biographical study of her life. He points out that in the year that Bess and Shrewsbury were married Bess's son Henry married Shrewsbury's daughter Grace, and her daughter Mary married his son Gilbert. These two child-marriages or 'espousals' appear to have been a key element in Bess and Shrewsbury's marriage settlement, details of which have unfortunately been lost. Bess's first and third marriages, to Robert Barley and Sir William St Loe respectively, are nowhere represented in Bess's dynastic iconography, which concentrates on her Hardwick, Cavendish and Talbot identities, emphasising her children and both Sir William Cavendish and George Talbot with monograms, ciphers, heraldry and emblems.³⁴

The significance of Bess's past family identity for her present is clear from the Cavendish panel border monograms, in which past and present are superimposed. Supporting the motto in compositional terms, the letters E and S are worked in mirror format. Thus, from her coronetted present identity as Countess of Shrewsbury, Bess looks backwards into her past, as it were, and forward into the future. The same

³⁴ The overmantles of the Hardwick New Hall fireplaces, designed in the 1590s as part of the New Hall project after the death of George Talbot in May 1590, assert in heraldry the dynasty formed by consolidating Bess's marriages: 'variations struck between the arms and supporters of Cavendish, Hardwick and Talbot with occasional reference to the marriage of her children' (Durant, p. 163). Various needlework projects employ monograms to achieve the same effects. The Oxburgh hangings, for example, include a number of octagonal panels with ciphers, monograms and names. The letters 'George Shrewesbry' surround a coronetted monogram of the same name on the Cavendish hanging, and its companion, a coronetted 'Elizabeth Talbot' monogram surrounded by the name 'Elizabeth Shrewesbry', forms part of the Shrewsbury hanging. Amongst the fragments of the fourth hanging are three badly damaged octagonal panels, with the names 'Gra[ce Caven]disshe', '[Hen]ry Caven[disshe]', and 'Henry Grac[e Cavendiss]he' surrounding monograms showing the surviving letters 'R. A. S. E. G.', 'H. C. S. I.', and mutilated half letters respectively.

technique is used for William Cavendish's monogram which heads the composition. The letters C, facing both backwards and forwards, commemorate his past and resurrect a Cavendish future lived through his children. Although the Cavendish motto '*Cavendo Tutus*', 'By guarding safe' is balanced in the bottom left corner by Bess's ES monogram in the bottom right, the composition is 'signed' 'W. E. C.' in the top right corner, in Bess's previous identity as Elizabeth Cavendish, with the date 1570, three years into her Shrewsbury marriage.

It was earlier pointed out that the source for the Cavendish panel was the impresa of Mary Stuart's former mother-in-law at the French court, Catherine de' Medici. In 'Embroidering a Royal Identity' I suggested that Bess's use of the panel had both significance for terms of Bess's programme of bodying forth persona, and also a powerful subtext which contributed to Mary Stuart's own iconographical programme. Mary, I argued, used the iconographical memory of her former husbands as a political strategy for reasserting her former status as divinely-appointed Dauphiness and Queen Consort to the French Crown, and her place as Scottish queen and mother to James VI. The iconography of the Oxburgh panels recalled Mary's first French marriage with monograms and emblems, and emblematic techniques were also used to recall her second marriage to Darnley, stressing the generation of a male heir to the throne in James VI. I further argued that the display in the house where she lived in captivity of her former mother-in-law's *Extinctam lachrimae* emblem, reworked in the Cavendish panel, would have fed into this programme.³⁵ Iconographical appropriation was a technique which Mary had seen in use during her time at the French court, where Catherine de' Medici had used her visual mythmaking to overwrite and appropriate the

³⁵ See, for example, 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', pp. 46-47, 55-56, 78-79.

iconography developed by her husband's powerful mistress, Diane de Poitiers.³⁶ Bess of Hardwick's Cavendish panel is not only evidence of collaboration between herself and the Scots' Queen, it also suggests that the very source of Bess's iconographical presentation of the persona of powerful widow and matriarch was Mary Stuart. At the same time, the panel's Marian political subtext suggests that such design collaboration was more than a sharing of ideas and sources, that in fact Bess's iconography, whilst being a powerfully effective means of figuring forth persona, was also being appropriated by Mary for her own purposes.

A further link with the iconography of Catherine de' Medici supports the notion that Mary Stuart was the conduit for Bess's programme, and that she was appropriating imagery which functioned so well for Bess with subtexts of her own. Artemisia, who appears as one of the famous women in Bess's Virtues hangings, dated 1573 and accompanied by Constancy and Piety, was the exemplary widow used as the prototype for Catherine de' Medici's iconographical programme. It was indeed in de' Medici's presentation of herself as Artemisia that the tears and quicklime emblem had been employed.³⁷ Artemisia's story had been represented for Catherine in a series of fifty-nine drawings produced (but never made up) by 1562 as tapestry designs for de' Medici by the artist Antoine Caron and others. The borders of the drawings contain the tears on

³⁶ For details of this appropriation see Sheila ffoliot, 'Figuring the Powerful Widow: Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia', in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, pp. 227-41. For a discussion of how Elizabeth I employed Poitiers's strategies as the prototype for her cult of the Virgin Queen, see Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 38-60.

³⁷ Sheila ffoliot has analysed the way in which the Artemisia story served de' Medici, in 'Figuring the Powerful Widow'. The influence of Catherine de' Medici's programme can be clearly seen in Mary Stuart's own programme, in the way the heroic, male virtues are coupled with the divine perfection of the female virtues in Mary's presentation of herself, in the iconographical insistence on Mary's ancestry, legitimating her rule, and in the non-threatening, self-effacing sight of a woman embroidering in public (see reference to 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', above). For notes on other aspects of de' Medici's iconographical programme, see Frances Yates, *The Valois Tapestries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959).

quicklime motto, as well as the mourning emblems of broken mirrors, feathers and cords cut with scythes, which found their way into the borders of Bess's Cavendish panel (fig. B.24). Artemisia was

queen of Caria in Asia Minor in the fourth century BC. She was best known to the Renaissance, through Boccaccio's brief biography in *De claris mulieribus*, as the inconsolable widow of Mausolus. After his death she ruled Caria in her own right and supervised the building of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, a funerary monument so famous as one of the Seven Wonders of the World that it gave its name subsequently to an entire genre. Artemisia, then, was celebrated as being something that none of the immortals could ever be: a widow. She proved the perfect prototype for Catherine in that she both dramatically mourned the loss of her husband – the rightful monarch – and stood as an authoritative ruler in his stead.³⁸

Artemisia also proved the perfect prototype for Bess of Hardwick: she figured Bess as the faithful widow who had lost none of her power and status with the passing of her husband. In fact, the independent resourcefulness of the figure of Artemisia, recalled through Catherine de' Medici's *Extinctam lachrimae* Cavendish centrepiece, links this emblematic panel in significance to its sister panel, *Ingenii largitor*, which publicly tropes Bess's natural talents and abilities – the Cavendish link is emphasised by the substitution in the Shrewsbury panel of Cavendish entwined snakes for the design of the handles of Paradin's original urn.³⁹ That both personae, wife and widow, could simultaneously be constructed in the same set of hangings is an indication of the fluidity of the early modern system of signs, and of the complexity of the figured early modern public persona.

Artemisia not only built an architectural monument to her husband's memory, but also

³⁸ ffoliot, p. 230.

³⁹ The grotesque above Penelope's head in the Virtues hanging also has snakes worked into the design.

drank her husband's ashes dissolved in a cup of wine, making of her body a living tomb. When Bess claimed Artemisia's legendary virtues for herself in the Cavendish panel and the Artemisia hanging, she effectively rendered both architectural and flesh-and-blood monuments in emblematic, textile terms. As Bess's embroidered tears stand for her own in the Cavendish panel, she makes a permanent representation, a material memorial, of her duty as a widow to memorialise her dead husband in her living person, in her acts, and in the monuments she raises to him. The motto makes the iconography explicit: the literal tears and their embroidered representation both witness the life of the quenched flame, and also effect its resurrection. In the Hardwick Artemisia hanging the same technique of making needlework a metaphor for the body is used, with Artemisia pictured raising high the cup like a sacrament.

III: Appropriating the Masculine Virtues

The value of Artemisia to Bess of Hardwick was not confined to creating for herself the persona of powerful and virtuous widow. The de' Medici Artemisia drawings had presented a historical prototype of a female ruler, the ideal woman who possesses all the female virtues. But even the idealised female ruler's position is rendered weak by the fact of her gender. The de' Medici series overcomes this hurdle with compositional strategies that make a double claim for appropriation of the masculine virtues, firstly depicting Artemisia acting on behalf of her young son, and secondly making a visual association in the drawings with the figure of Hercules.⁴⁰ Bess emphasised these

⁴⁰ Perhaps the notion of appropriating both gender positions simultaneously had originated from Mary Stuart: she used iconographical exemplarity in her needlework to argue that she possessed the masculine virtues which she required for government (see 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', pp. 47, 69-70). A less immediate model for Bess was Elizabeth I; Elizabeth's manipulation of gender representations have been considered by Carole Levin in *"The Heart And Stomach of a King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

subtleties by depicting Artemisia accompanied by Constancy and Piety, the latter indicated by the figure of Pero, a classical heroine 'whose father Myco was in a [...] sorry plight and [...] under prison guard. A man in extreme old age, she put him like a baby to her breast and fed him'.⁴¹ She is depicted feeding her father through the bars of his prison (fig. B.25).⁴² Pero's young son stands by her side, together with a stork, emblematic of piety. The stork, which was believed to nourish its own parents when they grew old, also occurs as a panel on the Shrewsbury hanging (fig. B.26), echoing the hangings and emphasising Bess's maternal piety.⁴³ This imagery consolidates Bess's position as 'regent' for her two sons William and Charles in their minorities – she retained control over their affairs even after they came of age at the time of the Deed of Gift.⁴⁴

Male virtue is also claimed in another of the Virtues hangings, the appliquéd figure of Zenobia, dated 1573 (fig. B.27). Like Artemisia, Zenobia was a popular choice of exemplar in defences of women.⁴⁵ Elyot's Zenobia for example, says Constance Jordan,

⁴¹ '*Idem praedicatum de pietate Perus existimetur, quae patrem suum Mycona, consimili fortuna adfectum parique custodiae traditum, iam ultimae senectutis velut infantem pectori suo admotum aluit.*' Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, ed. and trans. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, The Loeb Classical Library, 492 (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), v.4. ext.1, p. 500-01.

⁴² The identity of the personifications of Constancy and Piety vary in critical studies. J. L. Nevins, following Valerius Maximus and the stitched gloss, terms Pero an 'example of filial piety' in 'Stitched for Bess of Hardwick: Embroideries at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire', *Country Life*, 29 November 1973, pp. 1756-61 (p. 1756). Margaret Ellis, by contrast, identifies the figure of Piety as the woman with praying hands, Latin cross, sword of faith, a pelican and flames of fire. This last attribute, she argues, alludes to 'the constancy of Mucius Scaevola' who 'represented Patience and Constancy, and was regarded as the prefiguration of the crucifixion, which provides the link with the virtue of Piety' ('The Hardwick Hall Hangings', p. 289).

⁴³ The stork is glossed by Whitney in *A Choice of Emblemes*, p. 73:

See heare the storke prouides with tender care
And bringeth meate, vnto her hatched broode:
They like againe, for her they doe prepare,
When shee is oulde, and can not get her foode.

⁴⁴ William did not even have an establishment of his own until 1593 when he and Bess built Owlcoates House, three miles from Hardwick, and until then he and his family lived in apartments with Bess at Hardwick (Durant, p. 186).

⁴⁵ See Wayne, Valerie, 'Zenobia in Medieval and Renaissance Literature', in *Ambiguous Realities*, ed. by Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson, pp. 48-65.



Fig. B.25 Detail of Artemisia hanging showing Pero suckling her father Myco



Fig. B.26 Detail of Shrewsbury hanging showing stork, left



Fig. B.27 Detail of Zenobia hanging showing Zenobia with lance and helmet

‘demonstrates to a greater degree than many of her counterparts the qualities conventional to a woman, but also, by contrast, those that distinguish humanist models. She duly conforms to the expectations of conservative readers by being modest, dutiful, temperate, patient and obedient to her husband’.⁴⁶ But her

education was characteristically humanist. [...] Her widowhood allowed her to demonstrate her civic virtues [...] she took control of the state, making speeches, establishing laws (on the basis of her household economy) [...] even conquering territory by the extraordinary means of moral suasion. [...] But her most daring and unusual trait [...] is her real autonomy in relation to her husband. [...] Zenobia obeys her husband, but only to a point. ‘Justice,’ she says, taught her to give ‘due obedience’ to her husband and restrained her from ‘anythyng whiche [was] not semely’. [...] A wife is exempt from constraints of her husband’s will if what her husband wishes ‘may tourne them bothe to losse or dyshonesty’.⁴⁷

Jordan’s analysis of the significance of Zenobia’s exemplarity in relation to the women of the time suggests striking parallels with what we know of Bess of Hardwick, especially with regards to the autonomy Bess demanded from her estranged husband – autonomy which was represented, moreover, in her subsequent legal battle with Shrewsbury over the hangings of the Vices and Virtues. Some contemporary theorists held that noble women who exhibited *le virili virtù* became *donne heroiche* (heroic ladies), and there was ‘no difference between the work and the offices they perform and those performed by heroic men’.⁴⁸ Bess’s iconographical appropriation of masculine virtue is an argument for gender equality, and a significant iconographical

⁴⁶ Jordan, ‘Feminism and the Humanists’, p. 254.

⁴⁷ Jordan, ‘Feminism and the Humanists’, pp. 254-55, citing Thomas Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women*, sig. E1^v; sig E2^r.

⁴⁸ Constance Jordan, ‘Renaissance Women and the Question of Class’, in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. by James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 90-106 (p. 96).

representation of both a theoretical and actual disruption of the received hierarchy of social relations.

Tudor narratives of Zenobia emphasised her preference for *non*-military solutions to her problems of state: she ‘added moche more to [her] Empire, not soo moche by force, as by renoume of juste and politike governaunce’.⁴⁹ By selecting Zenobia as one of her prototypes, Bess recalls her own skill in domestic economy through Zenobia’s legendary abilities. But Bess’s Zenobia is depicted wearing an armoured breastplate with her left hand holding her lance and her right resting on her armoured helmet. Claiming the iconographical language of male virtue, Bess asserts her independence from her husband, and presents herself as law-giver and governor. This is argumentative sleight of hand: her womanly virtues (her skill in domestic economy) confer upon her male privileges of rule, at the same time as she rewrites her successful policy of acquisition as a feminine virtue.⁵⁰ The accompanying figures of Prudence (a female attribute) and Magnanimity (a male virtue) support my reading. Prudence is emblematically asserted further in both the Cavendish and Shrewsbury hangings, in panels showing a crane (Cavendish hanging) and a camel (occurring in both hangings) (figs. B.28a and b).

It has been asserted that Bess’s level of intellectual education was low.⁵¹ But she had access to Mary Stuart’s library during Mary’s time of imprisonment – and the identified

⁴⁹ Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women*, sig. E5’, cited in Jordan, ‘Feminism and the Humanists’, p. 255.

⁵⁰ Jordan explores the ‘paradoxical arguments’ produced by proofs in the defence of women based on example in ‘Feminism and the Humanists’, p. 252.

⁵¹ Durant, *Bess of Hardwick*, p. 64.



Fig. B.28a Detail of Shrewsbury hanging showing a 'Crane'

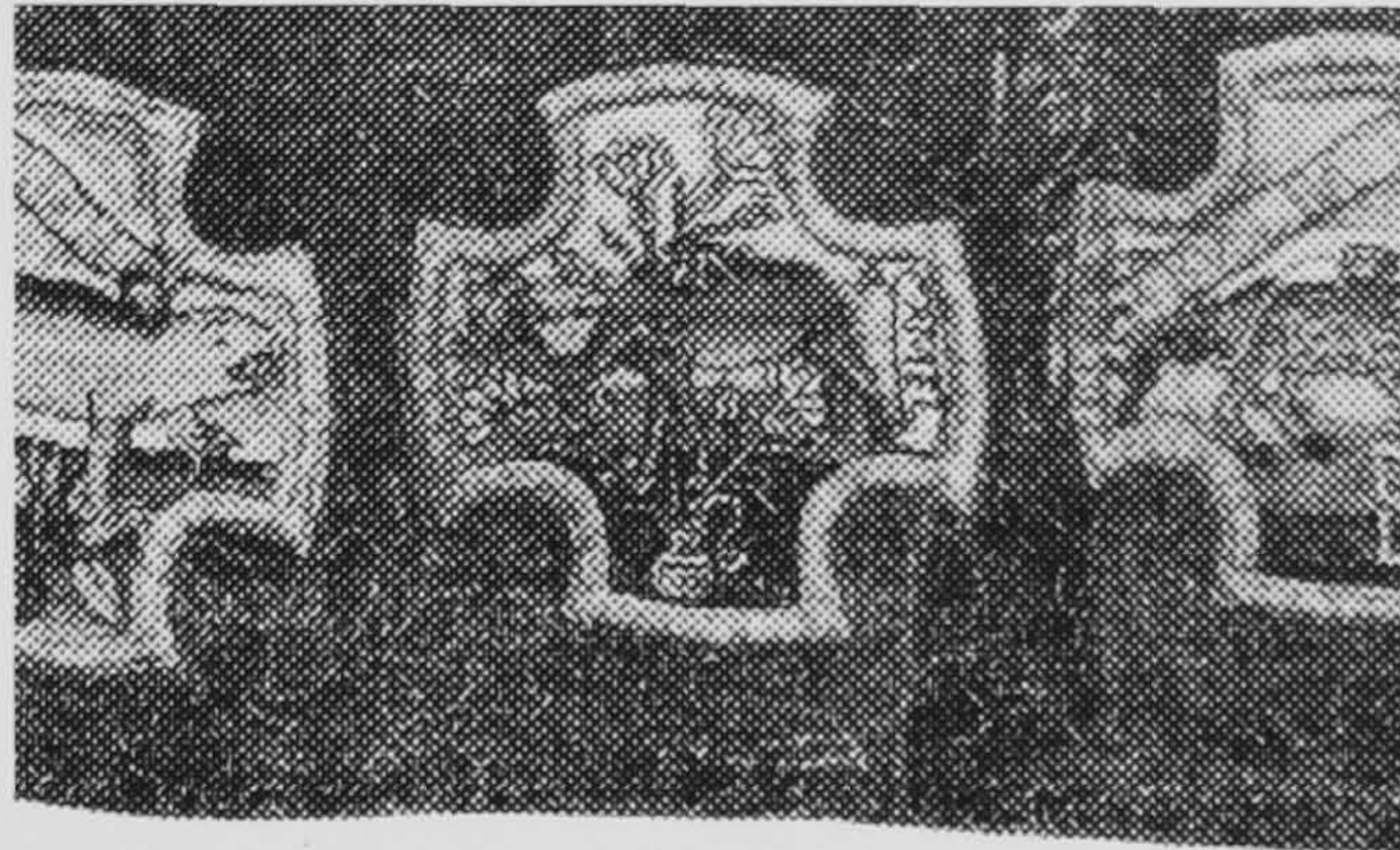


Fig. B.28b Detail of Cevendish hanging showing a 'Camel'



Fig. B.29 Detail of Story of Tobit table carpet showing painter's and embroiderer's tools weighed on scales in border

sources of Bess's needlework stand as evidence that she used it.⁵² No books are inventoried in Arbella Stuart's room at Hardwick either, as Levey points out, yet Bess's grand-daughter referred to her own bedroom as her 'quondam study chamber'.⁵³ Mary's influence on Bess's philosophical ideas is also traceable in the needlework. The border of a table carpet dated 1579 showing the Story of Tobit contains a visual representation of a philosophical debate in which Mary Stuart had engaged with Elizabeth's envoy Nicholas White a decade earlier. He reported to Cecil that 'she entered into a pretty disputable comparison between carving, painting, and working with the needle, affirming painting in her opinion for the most commendable quality'.⁵⁴ The table carpet border detail depicts just such a 'disputable comparison', a balanced set of scales on which are hung the tools of a painter's trade on one side, and embroiderers' tools on the other (fig. B.29).⁵⁵ Whilst Arbella's humanist education is clearly demonstrated in her erudite letters, the evidence of Bess's education is contained in her visual displays, in the paintings she commissioned, the plaster decoration in her houses, the tapestries, and especially in her textiles, including needlework.

⁵² During her time with the Shrewsburys Mary Stuart was moved forty-six times, and Shrewsbury had to bear the 'expense caused by the transportation of her books and other weighty trumpery, on which she placed much importance'. Cited, unattributed, in Durant, p. 73. No books are inventoried by title in the Chartley Inventory. A memorandum attached to a list of effects in the custody of Mary's servants recorded that 'there remayneth in the sayd late Quenes cabinet and other places, a greate number of bookes [...] which are also claymed by the severall servauntes as geven to them by their mistris' (Labanoff, VII, p. 272). Records of Mary's library in Scotland are reproduced 'The Library of Mary Queen of Scots and of King James VI', in *Miscellany of the Maitland Club: Consisting of Original Papers and Other Documents Illustrative of the History and Literature of Scotland*, 4 vols (Edinburgh and Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1834-47), I (Edinburgh: Maitland Club, 1834), pp. 1-24; and in *Inventaires de la Royne Descosse Douairiere de France: A Catalogue of Jewels, Dresses, Furniture, Books and Paintings of Mary, Queen of Scots, 1556-1569* ed. by J. Robertson (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1863), pp. cxliii-cxlvii.

⁵³ Arbella was closely confined at her grandmother's house, and evidently shut in her chambers with little to do: 'I sent my page this afternoone for somm bookes into my quondam study chamber, which he might not be suffred to enter, much lesse I to receive the comfort and good counsell of my dead counsellors and comforters' (Letter dated 7 March 1603 to Sir Henry Brounker, HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, XII, p. 685, no. 13).

⁵⁴ Letter dated 26 February 1569, HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, I, p. 400.

⁵⁵ Levey comments, 'Bess seems to have remained more open-minded or perhaps the question had become a joke between the painter and embroiderer who drew out and worked the carpet' (*An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 54).

Cycles of hangings and sets of needlework cushions make a visual assertion of a complete humanist education, classical, philosophical, natural and cosmological. Nine of the twelve signs of the zodiac, for example, are depicted in the skies above a narrow, continuous landscape on set of narrow panels which may once have been part of the hangings in one of the Best Bedchamber suite of rooms (fig. B.30). Classical references have already been encountered here in the hangings of the Virtues, and Bess also had made a companion set of 'Virtues and their Contraries': Faith, for example, flanked by Mahomet, Hope with Judas, and Temperance (in place of Charity) with Sardanapalus.⁵⁶ A number of other appliquéd panels cover other humanist ground: more virtues and vices, 'the Sun, Moon, Earth, Water, and nymphs of the natural world; Smell from the five senses; nymphs, gods and goddesses from classical mythology as well as more abstract concepts such as Fortune, Abundance and Intelligence.'⁵⁷ Eight Liberal Arts (instead of the traditional seven) are represented in classical style in a set of large and much altered panels (fig. B.31). The five senses may also have been represented on another series of panels, of which one fragment survives, showing Hearing represented by a female lutenist. Bess's self-presentation asserts the kind of education her peers expected of a woman of her position: her textiles constitute an extensive display of intellectual knowledge, the visual equivalent, for a woman of her time, of a library.

Bess of Hardwick's textiles were designed for a specific purpose. The luxurious fabrics and materials presented personage to her social context, and the iconography of their

⁵⁶ Many commentators have remarked upon the substitution of Charity with Temperance, and the choice of the name Temperance for Bess's second child, who died in infancy. Evidence of costume and design detail studied by Levey suggests that this second set of virtues was not yet completed when Bess moved out of Chatsworth and went to Hardwick Hall.

⁵⁷ Levey describes the workmanship and design concepts are described in detail in *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 66.

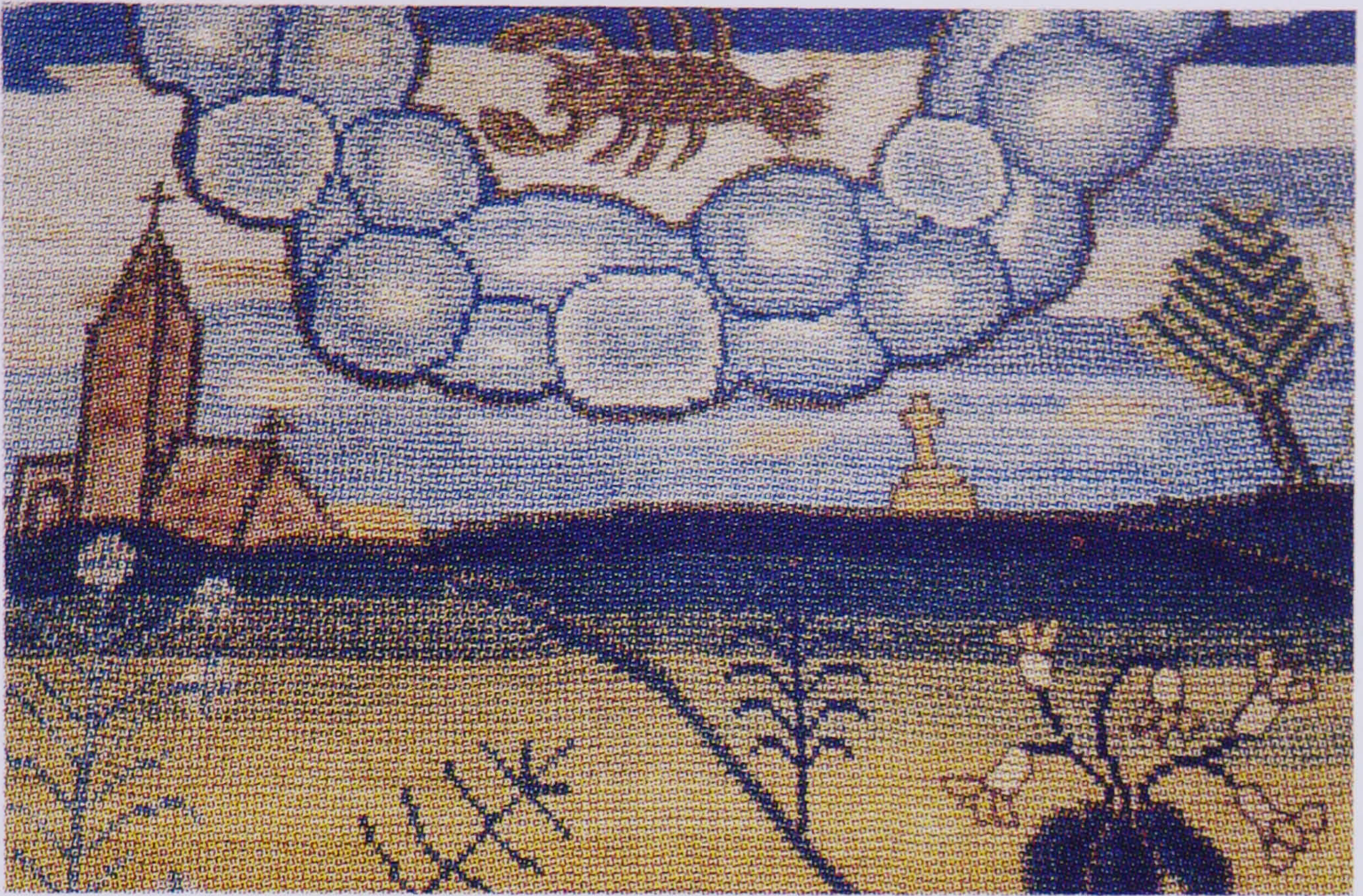


Fig. B.30 Detail of Zodiac panels showing the Sign of Cancer (Hardwick Hall)



Fig. B.31 Detail of Liberal Arts panels showing Arithmetic (Hardwick Hall)

embroidered surfaces encoded with precision powerful personae. Bess's personae of faithful, virtuous wife and widow, of the dynastic matriarch who claimed both male and female virtues, is figured equally in large-scale schemes such as the Virtues hangings, and in the minutiae of border details such as the Judgement of Paris table carpet. The personae are elaborated with particular emphasis in those pieces which Bess worked herself, such as the central panels of the Cavendish and Shrewsbury hangings, which she signed with her monograms. The monogrammed pieces are intended to display in practical terms the claims of their iconography, to bear witness to needlework-as-practice, to the performance of virtue by the accomplished aristocratic needlewoman. Each separate textile contributes to the elaboration of an iconographical vocabulary which is personal to Bess. The 1601 inventories reveal that Bess's iconographical vocabulary is deployed emphatically throughout the textiles in the reception rooms in the State apartments and in the Withdrawing Chamber, 'the magnificent centrepiece for the suite'.⁵⁸ The embroidered vocabulary locks into an overall scheme which includes architectural and painted details. The cumulative effect was that on whatever surface the elite contemporary visitor's eye rested, whether architectural, painted or material, Bess's virtues as powerful wife and widow were blazoned.

⁵⁸ Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p. 33. See also Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, for the inventories of the State apartments.

CHAPTER 2: EMBROIDERING FAITH

The Calendar of State Papers for 1637 records an incident in which the Puritan Lady Eleanor Davies marched into Lichfield Cathedral with a bucketful of pitch and splashed it over the altar hangings:

with a pot of water, tar, and other filthy things, most profanely defild the hangings at the altar of the cathedral, and said she had sprinkled holy water upon them against their next communion.¹

Her action was supported by Marie, wife of Lichfield town clerk Michael Noble, and a Susan Walker, who said that she had ‘but done her conscience’, and that ‘Lady Davies would better justify that filthy act than those that caused the hangings to be put up’. The incident serves to illustrate the depth of feelings aroused in early modern England by the use of vestments and church furnishings — they were the subject of constant controversy throughout the Tudor and Stuart periods, beginning with the stripping of the altars during the Reformation (when many congregations still used vestments, as evidenced by visitation records) and in particular during the first and second Vestments Controversies, and continuing long after the rehabilitation of altar cloths a century later under Archbishop Laud in the 1630s (when many people, especially Puritans like Lady Eleanor Davies, still abominated them).² The only certainty in this disputed territory is

¹ *CSP: Domestic, Charles I*, XII: 1637-1638, p. 219, no. 94. These actions were interpreted by other contemporaries as being the act of a madwoman: Lady Weston (wife of Sir Simon) asked Susan Walker ‘wherefore Lady Davies would so wrong herself’. Lady Eleanor Davies had long been suspected of being insane. Her revelatory prophecies and slanders against the house of Stanley, printed in Amsterdam in 1633, were the occasion of a £3,000 fine and a term in prison. Her daughter Lucy, Lady Hastings, petitioned the king for her transfer from the Gatehouse, some female company and a ‘grave divine’ to inform her ‘in some points of learning and conscience’ *CSP: Domestic, Charles I*, VI: 1633-1634, p. 346, no. 21. (see also nos. 19, 20). By 1639 Lady Eleanor Davies had been ‘a long time in Bedlam’, a contemporary noted, ‘and there I think she will end her days’. She had continued to make prophecies, ‘like herself, very false’ (Thomas Smith to Sir John Pennington, 27 March 1639, *CSP: Domestic, Charles I*, XIII: 1638-1639, p. 620, no. 61).

² For a thorough study of the Vestments Controversies, see John Henry Primus, *The Vestments Controversy: A Historical Study of the Earliest Tensions within the Church of England in the Reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth* (Kampen: Kok, 1960).

that the overwhelming majority of vestments and church furnishings for one reason or another have not survived. Contemporary documents, churchwardens' accounts and records of visitations in particular show that at any one time there was a complete range of responses to the official position of the moment on church embroidery, raging from enthusiastic destruction, opportunistic looting or orderly and documented selling-off of assets, through expedient storage for later retrieval and recuperation, to continued, open use of vestments in defiance of the regulations in force.³ In addition, the textile history of any one church varied over time and according to the tastes of the incumbent and congregation, as well as the rigour of the representatives of the ecclesiastical authorities in the area. For example, the representative imagery embroidered onto the Sadler's Company ceremonial pall (fig. 2.1) was covered up to comply with regulations in force: the velvet oval nimbi, surrounded by angels and containing the sacred monogram typical of Laudian embroidery, were removed during repairs to the pall, and pictures of the Virgin Mary were revealed underneath.⁴ The head of the Virgin was defaced before being covered up; rather than destroy a valuable textile by ripping out part of the fabric, compliance was achieved by ruining the image itself.

Changes to the official position on vestments in the early modern period were many and confusing to the parishes. Catholic visitations of Mary's reign had sought to undo the Henrician and Edwardian reforms. Parishes were typically ordered to replace articles destroyed during the preceding two reigns, one, for example, being cautioned: 'ffirste to provide the fronnte for thaulter bothe above thaulter and benethe with th imagis of Christe paynted in the myddest thereof for the workindais and curteins of silk for

³ An illuminating and representative range of documents is included in *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*, ed. by David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁴ Beryl Dean, *Embroidery in Religion and Ceremonial* (London: Batsford, 1985), p. 21.

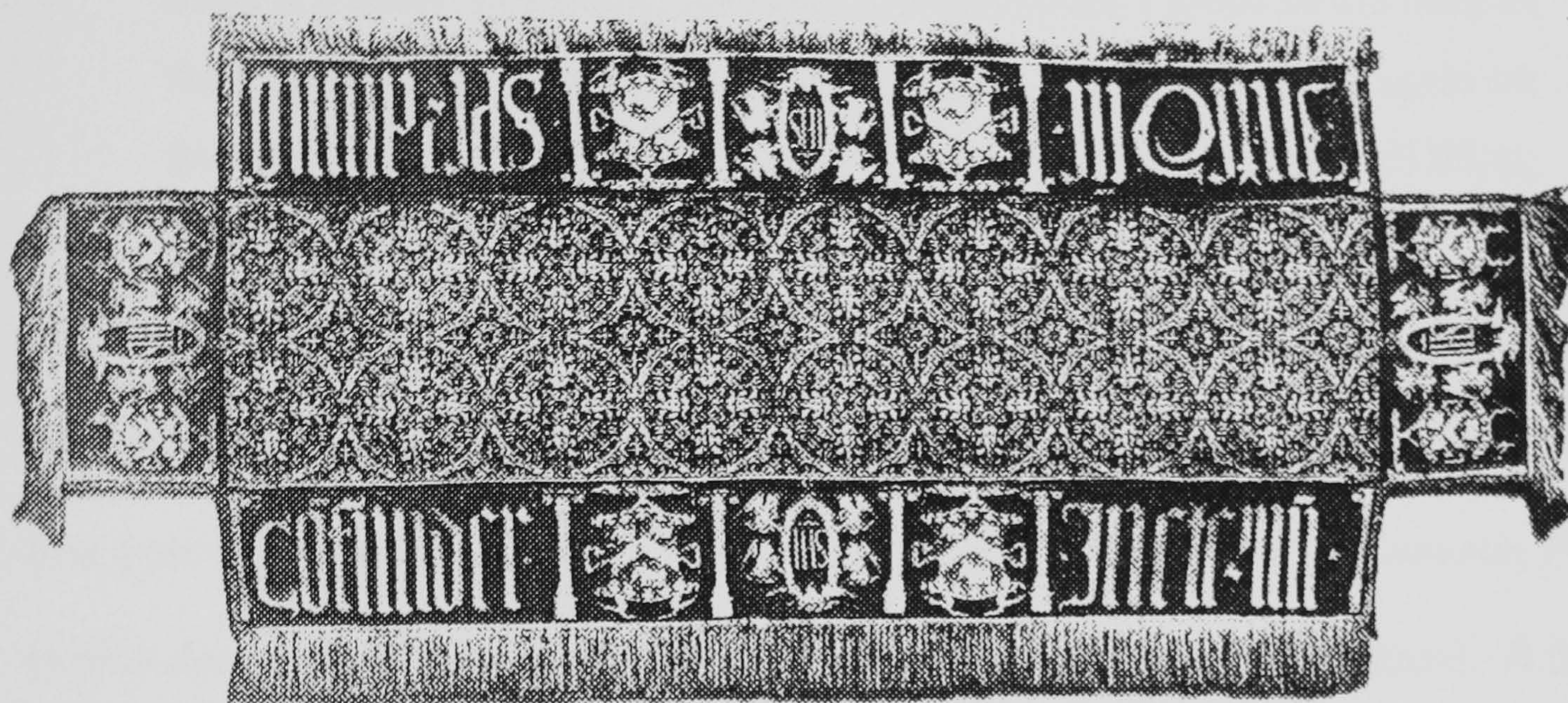


Fig. 2.1 Sadler's Company Pall. Early 16th c (Victoria and Albert Museum)

hollidais'.⁵ Under Elizabeth the process was again reversed, although slowly and unevenly at first. The 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* admitted widespread diversity of liturgical practice due to a difficulty in creating uniformity of taste:

And whereas in this our time the minds of men are so diverse that some think it a great matter of conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs, and again on the other side, some be so newfangled that they would innovate all thing, and so do despise the old, that nothing can like them but that is new.⁶

Whilst this prayer book stipulated the use of vestments as they had been employed in 1549, the 'Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Divine Service' passed in the first year of Elizabeth's reign enshrined the use of the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* (which decreed that the surplice only should be worn for Holy Communion). It further stipulated, conservatively, that 'such ornaments of the Church and of the ministers thereof shall be retained and be in use as was in this Church of England by authority of Parliament in the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth until other order shall be therein taken by the authority of the Queen's Majesty'.⁷ Vestments were accordingly retained until such an 'other order' came in 1566 with the *Advertisements*, subsequently reinforced by the 1604 *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical*, in which the surplice was identified as the only proper ecclesiastical dress.⁸ Zealous Protestants

⁵ *Archdeacon Harpsfield's Visitation: 1557*, ed. by Rev. L. E. Whatmore, Publications of the Catholic Record Society, 45, 2 vols (London: Catholic Record Society, 1950), I (p. 47).

⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. by John E. Booty (London: Jugge & Cawode, 1559; repr. Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1979), 'Of Ceremonies. Why Some Be Abolished and Some Retained', p. 19.

⁷ 'An Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church, and the Administration of the Sacraments', I Elizabeth. c.2.25, in *The Statutes at Large*, ed. by Danby Pickering, (Cambridge: Bentham, 1763), VI: *From the First Year of Q. Mary to the Thirty-fifth Year of Q. Elizabeth, inclusive*.

⁸ *Advertisements, partly for due order in the Public Administration of Common Prayers and using the Holy Sacraments, and partly for the Apparel of all Persons Ecclesiastical, by virtue of the Queen's Majesty's Letters commanding the same*, issued March 1566 by Archbishop Parker, text in H. Gee and W. J. Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History Compiled from Original Sources* (Macmillan: London, 1896), pp. 467-75; *Constitutions & Canons Ecclesiastical, 1604*, ed. by H. A. Wilson ([Oxford]: Clarendon Press, 1923).

returned to the business of rooting out all vestments except the copes, retained in cathedrals and other high churches.⁹

Laudian beautification of the altars restored representative embroidery to the Anglican churches in the 1630s, such as the surviving altar-cushion covers depicting the Last Supper in Winchester College and the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 2.2). Whilst Puritans like Lady Eleanor Davies rejected ‘papist’ textiles, Anglican royalists such as the Culpepper ladies returned to representative embroidery, working the oak leaves that were tokens of their political allegiance into the sign of their religious denomination, their 1658 Commonwealth altar cloth, still preserved in Hollingbourne Church in Kent (fig. 2.3). The Restoration brought with it wider enthusiasm for such frontals: Bishop Hacket recorded sumptuous personal donations of textiles from local aristocrats for Lichfield Cathedral in 1668, although it is not specified whether the workmanship was executed domestically or by professionals:

In vellet, purple, and azure, fiftie pounds worth from the excellent Ladie Levison, to serve for a paraphrast, a suffront, and carpet for the Altar. From my Ladie Bagot, most rich pieces of gold and silke, and excellent imagery for the two quishions, whose making up being added from a devout aged widow, and a poore one, Mrs. Hulkes, they are as beautiful as euer I saw. Add to these, the most curious piece that I have seen, of purple vellet, flowry gold and silke, to bee placed in the paraphront above the quishion.¹⁰

Indeed, the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* returned to the Elizabethan rubric of 1559,

⁹ Copes continued to be used, especially in the cathedrals, although they were unpopular with many: James I’s visit to St Paul’s in March 1620 inspired a popular song deriding ‘the priests in copes, like so many Popes’ (Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London: Batsford, 1984), p. 89).

¹⁰ Bodleian Library, Tanner MS. 44, fol. 66, cited in John Wickham Legg, *English Church Life from the Restoration to the Tractarian Movement* (London: Longmans, 1914), p. 138.

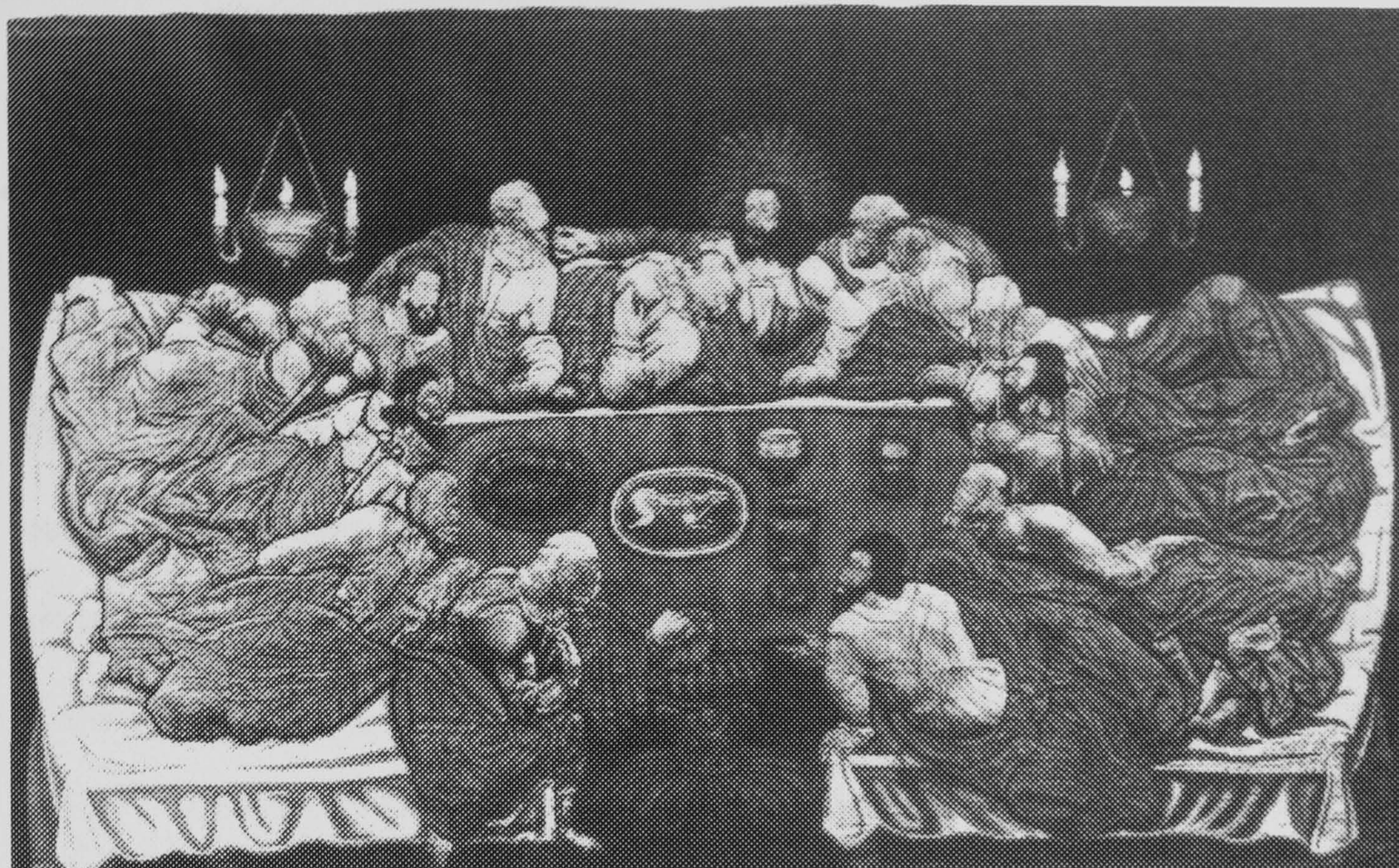


Fig. 2.2 Altar-dossal depicting the Last Supper. c.1633 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

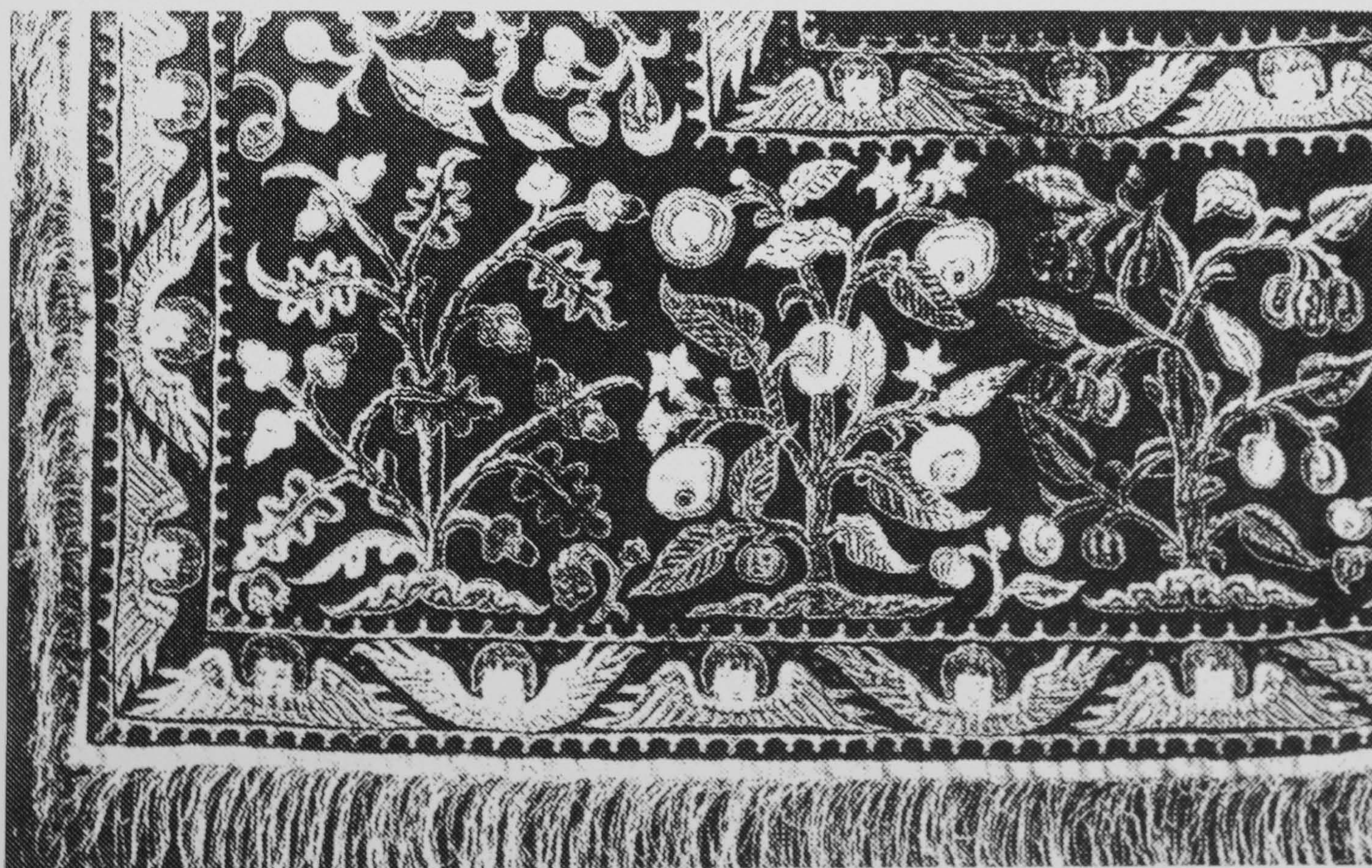


Fig. 2.3 Culpepper altar cloth (Hollingbourne Church, Kent)

calling for vestments to be used as they had been in 1549.¹¹

But the official position on vestments was not necessarily reflected in practice. Attitudes to vestments mirrored the wide range of attitudes towards religion in general over the period. Christopher Haigh categorises these attitudes towards Reformation into four broad groups: the godly Protestants (the zealous reformers mainly in the south and east), the ubiquitous parish Anglicans (who stressed communal values and Prayer Book rituals), the recusant papists, scattered in many places, and the marginalised old Catholics, following an unreconstructed and openly Catholic religion in the north and west.¹² Archiepiscopal Visitation Books record the diversity of practice amongst the parish Anglicans: in one case of Yorkshire intransigence in 1575 it was recorded that

John Troughton keepeth certain vestments viz. One vestment of black velvet, and for the deacons of the same, another vestment of white silk or chamlett, one vestment of red silk, another of blue worset which the Churchwardens and sworn men have demanded and cannot have.¹³

Another typical case, this time of sloppy ecclesiastical housekeeping, occurred in the parish of St Denis, where ‘certain copes & vestments’ were ‘defaced but not converted to good use’.¹⁴ By 1597-98 the parish church of St Edmund, Salisbury, had pared down

¹¹ Of course, controversy did not end here. A lady who had embroidered an altar cloth for a clergyman’s chapel well into the eighteenth century was still concerned about the appropriateness of her gift: ‘Oct. 28 1740. I am glad the Chapple is done, and succeeds to your mind [...] 135 years in your chapele, and I conclude the old green Cloath has been so too [...] I hope this Crimson won’t offend the Doctor Osborn. He was a little outragious at the Colour. I unfortunately called it red, and that is not so right for a Chaple. Is he reconciled to the Tapistry at the Altar? He is not sure if that does not favour a popish one.’ (Mrs Osborne, *Political and Social Letters of a Lady of the Eighteenth Century, 1721-1771* ([n.p.]: Griffith & Farrar, [1890?]), cited in Wickham Legg, p. 72. The subject is still debated today: Roger Lee Brown recommended in 1982 the efficacy of ‘a sense of gentle ridicule’, in *How to Rid your Church of Vestments: Some Practical Advice* ([Tongwynlais, Cardiff]: the author, 1982), p. 6.

¹² Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 292.

¹³ *Borthwick Archiepiscopal Visitation Book of Detections and Compertes, 1575*, cited in J. C. H. Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York: 1558-1791*, Publications of the Catholic Record Society, Monograph Series, 2 ([London]: Catholic Record Society, 1970), pp. 173.

¹⁴ *Borthwick Archiepiscopal Visitation Book of Detections and Compertes, 1590*, fol. 96, cited in Aveling, p. 211. This comment may explain the treatment of the Sadlers’ Company Pall.

its textiles from the rich, extensive list of vestments and furnishings inventoried in 1554-55 to some simple cushions, altar cloths and communion towels, and a pulpit cloth 'translated' from a cope.¹⁵

Polarised positions in respect of vestments might be represented by the Puritan authors of the 'View of Popish Abuses Yet Remaining in the English Church' appended to the *Admonition to the Parliament* presented in 1572, and Nicholas Sander in his 1624 *Treatise of the Images of Christ*. The former considered vestments – even the watered-down Protestant remnants – and the embroidered decoration thereon, to be idolatrous and in direct defiance of the second commandment:¹⁶

and as for the apparell [...]. Copes, caps, surplesses, tippets and suche lyke baggage, the preachyng signes of popysh priesthode, the popes creatures [...] are as the garments of the Idole, to which we should say, avaunt and get thee hence. They are as the garments of Balamites, of popish priestes, enemies to God and all Christians. They serve not to edification, they have the shewe of evyll [...] they worke discorde, they hinder the preachyng of the Gospel, they kepe the memorie of Egipt styl amongst us, and put us in mynd of that abomination wherunto they in past times have served, they bryng the ministerie into contempte, they offend the weake, they encourage the obstinate.¹⁷

Sander, on the other hand, argued for the representational and iconic qualities of images to enhance worship and to stimulate devotion:

[Catholics] defend; that onlie those Images may be worshipped [...] which represent and bring us in minde, either that there is a God; or that

¹⁵ *Churchwardens' Accounts of S. Edmund & S. Thomas: Sarum 1443-1702*, ed. by Henry James Fowle Swayne (Wiltshire Record Society: Salisbury, 1896), pp. 101-02, 158, cited in *Religion and Society*, pp. 37, 79. By 1618-19, however, the church had two silk- and gold-embroidered cloths, one for the communion table and one for the pulpit (Swayne, p. 129, cited in *Religion and Society*, p. 80).

¹⁶ Exodus 20. 4-5.

¹⁷ John Field and Thomas Wilcox, *An Admonition to the Parliament* ([Hemel Hempstead?]: J. T. J. S [J. Stroud?], 1572), reproduced in *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt*, ed. by W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas (New York: Franklin, 1972), pp. 5-55 (pp. 35-36).

there are three persons of the Blessed Trinitie, or which represent Christ, or his holie Angels and Saints [...]. We defend it [...] that the same degree of honour is not due to the Images of Christ, of our Ladie, or of other Saints, which is due to Christ, our Ladie, and to other Saints themselves. But that there is a certaine proper honour due to holie Images, which may be called *a worship or honour due to a good Remembrance or Monument*.¹⁸

For Sander, the images of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints embroidered onto vestments and church furnishings were ‘a token of the inward worshipping which ought to be in us’.¹⁹ This was explained by the medieval symbolism described by Thomas à Kempis, in his *Imitatio Christi*, the formalisation of vestments into a ‘living picture of the passion and death of our lord’.²⁰ The notion of a ‘living picture’ was important: vestments not only had pictures of the events of Christ’s life embroidered onto them, but they also occupied an essential place in the performance of Catholic liturgy: the symbolic system of vesting expresses the putting on of Christ by the officiant. Thus, ‘the amice was the helmet of salvation, the alb symbolic of purity, the maniple of contrition, the girdle of continence, the stole of immortality and the chasuble of obedience and the burden of the priest’s responsibility’.²¹ If vestments were essential to the performance of the Mass, they were all but eliminated in the Protestant rite, and church furnishings only experienced their limited renaissance later in the period with the Laudian reforms.

Protestant women did embroider biblical themes in their needlework. Several studies

¹⁸ Nicholas Sander, *A Treatise of the Images of Christ, and of his Saints: And that it is Unlawfull to Breake Them, and Lawful to Honour Them* (Saint Omers: Haigham, 1624), pp. 17-18.

¹⁹ Sander, p. 15.

²⁰ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1947), IV.5.3.

²¹ Penelope Earle Wallis, ‘The Iconography of English Embroidered Vestments c. 1250-c. 1500’, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1988, p. 17n.

have treated embroidery with accepted Old Testament subject matter in more or less depth. They concentrate especially on those mass-produced designs for Old Testament needlework panels stitched in post-Laudian England, many examples of which are extant (fig. 2.4). As indicated earlier, Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* theorised that these panels, widely stitched by girls and young women, were used to inculcate notions of the feminine. Two dissertations treated the subject of seventeenth century biblical needlework in the 1990s, both to a greater or lesser extent following paths opened up by Rozsika Parker. Charlotte Mayhew focused her dissertation 'The Effects of Economic and Social Developments in the Seventeenth Century upon British Amateur Embroideries' on the sources of Stuart needlework, and included in her dissertation a discussion of the significance of specific biblical episodes in the early modern period and a catalogue of the National Museum of Scotland's needlework holdings.²² Ruth Geuter produced a broad survey of needlework produced at all social levels in 'Women and Embroidery: The Social, Religious and Political Meanings of Domestic Needlework in Seventeenth Century Britain'.²³ She follows Parker in considering needlework ultimately as an instrument of restrictive socialisation. Geuter's work includes several useful appendices, listing, for example, known embroiderers and their embroidered Biblical heroines.

It is debatable how much the biblical 'kits', stitched by unidentifiable women especially in the middle classes, can inform us about the religious sensibilities of the embroiderers. The same is true of the embroidered covers made for copies of the Bible, psalms or

²² Charlotte E. J. Mayhew, 'The Effects of Economic and Social Developments in the Seventeenth Century upon British Amateur Embroideries, with particular reference to the Collection in the National Museums of Scotland', unpublished masters thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1998. For the discussion of biblical episodes see pp. 26-31.

²³ Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, 1996.



Fig. 2.4 Stump work panel depicting the story of David and Bathsheba. Silk, metal thread and wooden moulds, 1665 (Lady Lever Gallery)

prayerbooks: the designs are, in general, Old Testament subjects or consist of geometric patterns.²⁴ These women and girls, beautifying the Word by stitching unrepresentative embroidered book-covers for their prayerbooks and bibles, or embroidering pre-printed Old Testament panels, were not doing anything necessarily less devotional than the recusant Catholic woman embroidering a crucifix on a vestment. The activity is, however, much more shadowy, and we know very little about what place such embroideries had in their spiritual lives. Needlework was undoubtedly undertaken in a spiritual context by Protestant women throughout the period: the preceding chapter considered the widespread encoding of needlework as a publicly godly practice for an aristocratic woman and her domestic servants. Two women were glimpsed at moments in which their faith and needlework came together: the Protestant Mary Sidney Herbert using embroidery in her psalm translations as both subject and structuring device for deeply-focused meditation, and, later in the seventeenth century, the Puritan Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, using personal experiences of embroidery seen or undertaken as fit material to meditate upon. Such detailed records are, however, few and far between.

This Chapter will concentrate on the unstudied Catholic production and use of vestments during the reigns of Elizabeth and James, when Catholics, on the one hand, were endeavouring to arrive at a delicate balance of religious conscience and political loyalty at the beginning of Protestant settlement, and the Protestant State on the other was formulating policies to contain the Catholic threat. It will begin with a brief consideration of the place of ecclesiastical textiles and textiles with religious iconography in the lives of those Catholics who seem to have negotiated some form of

²⁴ For embroidered book-bindings see, for example, John L. Nevins, *Catalogue of English Domestic Embroidery of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: HMSO, 1938), p. 48; Hughes, pp. 95-101, and Geuter, pp. 232-34.

public toleration, and the official space in which a blind eye seems at times to have been turned to Catholic freedom of conscience. The second part of this Chapter opens up the subject of *intolerance* by looking at the religious aspects of the needlework of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, and the way in which its iconography responded to changes in the tactics of Elizabeth and her parliament as they sought to deal with the problem of the Catholic plots which centred on Mary during her period of imprisonment in England.

The focus of the Chapter then deliberately narrows. Haigh's third category of English faithful, the recusant Catholic population, formed coherent communities during the period, and much material has survived which throws light on the lives of their members. How did their use of vestments respond to religious intolerance? The Society of Jesus and the Catholic Record Society are custodians and collators respectively of the documentation on the religious houses on the continent whither many recusants fled from religious persecution at home, and the third part of this Chapter examines the faint traces of their lost needlework for information about their needlework practices in exile. The fourth section makes use of recusant autobiographies, contemporary biographies and the extensive records of the Jesuit English Mission to recover the 'invisible stitching': the place of vestments in the hidden, interconnected, Catholic lives of the Midlands gentry. It was into this community that Helena Wintour was born, and the Chapter closes with a case study of her surviving embroidered vestments. The function of her vestments within the liturgy is considered and their iconography explored in depth as they are read alongside Catholic iconography from other contexts and emblem books in particular, to recover what the vestments have to tell of the experience of lived religion for one post-Tridentine Catholic recusant.

I: Living with the Enemy: Catholics in the Public View

In practice, Catholics did negotiate some working form of acceptance by the Protestant state, and existed in a strange pocket of tolerance. Four specific and very different instances are considered here, the use of vestments by imprisoned Jesuits, the deployment of Catholic iconography by a peer of the realm, and the Catholic commissions secured by two known members of the recusant gentry who also received commissions from the wealthy Protestant elite. Perhaps the most surprising example of the authorities' blind eye was the freedom allowed to Jesuits and Catholics in prison. A report by Fr Augustin Perez to Philip II of Spain in 1610 sums up the situation:

They capture priests daily and there are regularly twenty to thirty in gaols where they celebrate and administer the sacraments, for many Catholics go to receive them since the gaolers allow them to enter and depart when they offer a gratuity. However sometimes their entry is barred and the chalices and vestments are taken away from the priests to prevent their celebrating mass according to the condition of the times and the more or less strict orders that come from the bishops [...]. Nevertheless someone never fails to provide them with others with which they continue to celebrate and no effort is made to stop it.²⁵

In the very midst of the gaols where heretics were racked to within an inch of their lives, Catholic Mass was being celebrated regularly and almost openly with full ritual equipment including vestments. John Gerard was one such priest supplied with vestments in the Clink in the reign of Elizabeth and guarded by a deferent, accommodating official:

On Good Friday there was a large crowd in the room above mine, including every Catholic in the prison and many others from outside. I

²⁵ Sección de Estado, Archivo General de Simancas, 2513, n. fol., 'A Report on the Catholics of England', c. December 1610, trans. by and cited in A. J. Loomie, *Spain and the Jacobean Catholics*, Catholic Records Society Publications, Records Series, 64 and 68, 2 vols ([London]: Catholic Record Society, 1973-1978), I: 1603-1612 (1973), pp. 179-82 (p. 180).

had been through the ceremonies and read the prayers proper to the day [...] when the head gaoler of the prison came to the door of my cell below [...] and banged hard on the door, making a great noise. [...] I knew at once that it was the head gaoler – the other gaoler would never have dared to treat me in this way. [...] I slipped off my vestments. Then I hurried downstairs to stop the gaoler coming up and fining us all, for then, indeed, many would have had to suffer.²⁶

The vestments were smuggled in by friends. A great deal of food and furniture had to be supplied from the outside, provision not being made by the prison itself. When, for example, Gerard was held in the Tower, the warder

offered to fetch me a bed if any of my friends were willing, for beds are not provided in this prison, but the prisoner must find his own bed and any other furniture he wants, on condition that they go to the Lieutenant of the Tower, even if the prisoner is liberated. I told him my only friends were my old companions in the prison I had just left [...]. So the warder went off at once, and they gave him the kind of bed they knew I liked' (p. 105).

These conduits were exploited to provision the priests with massing stuff, as the following extract illustrates:

The gentleman's wife was allowed to visit him on fixed days and bring him clean linen and other things he needed. She carried them in a basket, and as she had now been doing this for years the warders had got out of the way of examining its contents. With her help I hoped we might little by little be able to bring in everything we needed for Mass. My friends, of course, could supply them (p. 128).

Vestments were even made in the prisons themselves: in the Gatehouse, Westminster,

²⁶ John Gerard, *Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, trans. by Philip Caraman, 2nd edn (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1956), p. 100. Subsequent references are given in the text. For a similar situation in Newgate, see HMC *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, XXIV: *Addenda (1605-1668)*, p. viii.

Gerard's one-time hostess Jane Wiseman 'devoted all her time to prayer or needlework – she made vestments and other things for the altar and sent them to different people. For two whole years this was her life' (p. 52).

One may speculate that vestments may have circulated within the prisons as a result of the gaolers' venality (evidenced by the above-mentioned 'perks' received by the Lieutenant of the Tower), or the economic necessity of supplementing their income. And it is always conceivable that some prison officers were crypto-Catholic supporters of the inmates. Research is frustrated by a lack of documentary material on the subject. If Gerard's account is to be believed, though, vestments were introduced, produced and used in the prisons of the Protestant establishment throughout the reign of Elizabeth.

In the outside world, high profile Catholic members of the nobility maintained and preserved their Catholic lifestyles, despite arrests and terms of imprisonment. The inventory taken on the death in 1614 of the life-long Catholic Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton (younger brother of Thomas, 4th Duke of Norfolk who was executed for his plans to marry Mary Queen of Scots), lists extensive collections of textiles and paintings in both Greenwich and Northampton House of a boldly iconic, Catholic nature.²⁷ Visitors to his house, both Catholic and Protestant, cannot fail to have noticed

²⁷ Henry Howard was arrested several times for suspected treason when his brother's plans to marry Mary Queen of Scots came to light. He served as a Privy Councillor under James I (1603), and was made Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and Earl of Northampton in 1604. He was a judge at the trials of Raleigh (1603), Guy Fawkes (1605) and Father Garnet, S. J. (1606). The inventory of Howard's possessions is reprinted in Evelyn Philip Shirley, 'An Inventory of the Effects of Henry Howard, K.G., Earl of Northampton, taken on his death in 1614, with a Transcript of his Will [...]', *Archaeologia*, 42 (1869), 347-378. Subsequent references are given in the text. The inventory is discussed by Linda Levy Peck in 'The Mentality of a Jacobean Grandee', in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, pp. 148-68. The collections and interior furnishings are considered pp. 165-68.

Unexpectedly, the Inventory of the household stuff of fervent Protestant Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester on his death in 1588 also records many paintings of the life of Christ, including 'the historie of the body of Christ after he was taken from the Crosse, with the iii Maries and their mother', 'the history of St John preaching in the wilderness', 'one other of harrowing hell', 'the birthe of Christ [...]

this strong visual statement. Whereas in the Withdrawing and Study Chambers walls were hung with 105 ells each of ‘busted hanginges of the storie of Sawle and David’ (which Elyot considered a ‘noble historie [...] eyther wrought in Aresse, or connyngly painted, which moche better be seme the houses of noble men than the Concubines and voluptuous pleasures of the same Daud and Salamon his sonne’),²⁸ the Long Gallery was hung with an astonishing 429 ells of ‘seaven large and deepe pieces of tapestrie of the storie of *Christ*’ (pp. 354, 357). Pictures in the Long Gallery included ‘a picture of St Francis with leaves, the one of the picture of our ladie, the other of *Christ* holding the crosse’, ‘a picture of the three Maries at the tomb’, the picture of Christ and or [sic] ladie with an arched frame’, ‘a picture of the Angell appearinge to the Shepheardes’ and ‘a large nighte piece of the birthe of Christ’ (p. 357). ‘Eight pictures of the Sibels’ could have been hung either for their secular significance or their recognised Christian symbolism.²⁹

There was a sharp division in the choice of paintings for Northampton House’s two galleries: in contrast to the Catholic icons in the Long Gallery, the Little Gallery was lined with portraits of the aristocracy and family. Speculation might suggest that guests of differing religious convictions were entertained in different locations – although it might have been expected that the Long Gallery would have been the more usually accessible of the two spaces. In the Bed Chamber, where the iconography included statements of the Earl’s personage in the form of a magnificent bed ‘of China worke blacke and silver branched with silver with the Armes of the Earl of Northampton’, the Earl’s twin loyalties were asserted in the form of two taffeta-curtained portraits of

with two leaves to fold and unfold’ (HMC, *Bath (Longleat)*, v: *Dudley Papers*, pp. 221-22).

²⁸ Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor*, pp. 238-39.

²⁹ For Sybil iconography in Catholic houses see also below, pp. 167-68.

Queen Elizabeth I and King James I juxtaposed with an identically-hung picture of the Passion (p. 255). An extensive collection of New Testament subjects was kept in the Long Wardrobe, itself lined with hangings of 'Brussels work with the *Cardinals Armes*', matching those in the bedchamber, as well as the more acceptable 'four pieces of tapestry with the story of Joseph' (p. 359).

Further hangings on these walls, and other textiles elsewhere in the house, were decorated with recognised Catholic emblems of the Virgin and Christ. Although Marian floral emblems such as marigolds and roses and Catholic devices such as burning hearts were also popular for secular use, it would be surprising if the pictorial emphasis on devotional images of the Virgin Mary in Howard's collections were not echoed in the choice of textiles stored in the Long Wardrobe: 'one lesser white satten [sweet] bagge embrodered on bothe sides with golde twiste roses and marigoldes', 'one large white satten sweet bagge embrodered with knottes of silver Oes with burning hartes', 'one white satten bagge imbrodred with a wreath of gold and greene silke leaves with burninge hartes roses and other flowers bothe sides alike', 'a large carnacion sweet bagge imbrodered with pellicanes butterfles and flowrs and lines with carnacion satten' and 'a square carpett of course carnacion frenche velvete with a pellicane of golde in the middest wrought on with cheine worke and lined with yellow taffata' 'redd, white and yelow roses and bunches of grapes' and 'a new white Taffata wastecote embrodred with vine leaves and grapes' (pp. 359-64).

The inventory of goods at Howard's house at Greenwich, in stark contrast to the more public visual statements of faith at Northampton House, indicates that the choice of textiles figuring Biblical subjects were limited to accepted Old Testament subjects such

as Solomon and David (although these would have occasioned Elyot's censure). There are no textiles that appear to be seditiously Catholic in nature. There are only four Catholic pictures: two in the Great Chamber ('Marie Magdalen [...] and a Mackerell [Fr Macquereau]'), one in the Winter Dining Chamber, 'a nighte piece of the whippings of Christe', and 'a double picture with the 3 kinges on one side' in the Wardrobe.³⁰ Perhaps this was a reversible picture that could be hung in such a way either to hide or display the religious image. Linda Levy Peck, considering various aspects of Howard's life with a view to 'decoding the self' they betoken, notes that 'in writings to Elizabeth and to James he invoked the image of the old hermit. It betokened an image both of removal from the queen's presence, but also, in the figure of St Jerome, of study, contemplation and wisdom.'³¹ Peck notes that St Jerome was 'a scourge of heretics and, in the Renaissance, identified with the cult of the Virgin', and this assumed persona would support a reading of Howard's collections of sacred images, both textile and painted, as incontrovertible statements of his Catholicism.³² In addition, Howard's semi-retired image (which contrasted with his actual political and social engagement) would have served him well in that it presented the face of non-threatening Catholicism to his Protestant monarchs, whilst maintaining his religious conscience. In any case his inventory shows that Howard had enjoyed effective immunity from the kinds of searches of Catholic houses, including those of the Midlands Catholic families such as the Wintours, which confiscated and destroyed so much iconographical material.³³

³⁰ Shirley, p. 70.

³¹ Peck, 'Mentality', p. 166.

³² Peck, 'Mentality', p. 166. She goes on to say that 'his devotional works, his role as religious controversialist, his charitable foundations established along monastic lines, suggest a religious vocation and perhaps, had England remained Catholic, Howard would have played a role similar to that of Bishop Stephen Gardiner [the patron of his one-time guardian, Bishop White]. In secret correspondence between Somerset and Overbury he was referred to as the Dominican' (pp. 166-67).

³³ For an in-depth study of Northampton which includes consideration of his Catholic stance, and his patronage of Catholic gentry see Linda Levy Peck, *Northampton: Patronage and Policy at the Court of James I* (London, Boston and Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), especially pp. 54-57.

Despite laws banning Catholics from public office, appointments of talented members of the Catholic gentry were made regularly. One such instance is that of the musician William Byrd, gentleman of the Chapel Royal, who appears with three other gentlemen in the contemporary watercolour of Queen Elizabeth's funeral procession wearing copes. The orphreys of the cope worn by the nearest Gentleman appear to be decorated with panels of saints, in the style of *Opus Anglicanum* (fig. 2.5). The watercolour, if accurate, suggests that the sanctioned use of copes in Cathedrals meant that 'heretical' images of saints were in practice still deployed at the end of Elizabeth's reign when old copes were worn. Despite unquestioned loyalty to Elizabeth I, a lifetime of service, the gift of the lease for Standon Place and the granting of the patent (with Tallis) for printed sheet music, Byrd's name appears regularly on the recusant rolls between 1577 and 1620. The situation was apparently officially squared by letters assuring him the protection of the Privy Council against failing to attend church during the reigns of both Elizabeth and James.³⁴

Byrd's 'double life' is represented in shorthand form by the dedications of his works: beginning with the strategic patronage of Elizabeth I and the very anti-Catholic Sir Christopher Hatton, in 1575 and 1588 respectively, he later dedicated works to Gilbert, Lord Talbot, the Catholic 7th Earl of Shrewsbury, Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester, and Lord Petre. Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton was also one of his patrons. Byrd risked his privileged and protected position to associate with those at the very heart of Catholic sedition, playing at a chapel in a private house near Marlow for the Jesuits Garnet, Weston and Southwell in 1586. Weston's recollection of the occasion was that

³⁴ William Byrd to the Earl of Salisbury, before 24 May 1612, HMC *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, Series 9, XXIV: *Addenda (1605-1668)*, p. 219.

Children of the Chappell.

*Gentlemen of the
Chappell.*



Fig. 2.5 William Byrd taking part in Elizabeth's funeral procession (BM Add MS 35342, fol. 31^v)

‘it was just as if we were celebrating an uninterrupted octave of some great feast’.³⁵ Byrd’s son Christopher was brother-in-law to Thomas More, chaplain to Lady Magdalen Montague. Byrd is recorded by Ralph Sheldon as being entertained by Lord Paget at Drayton and elsewhere in 1581-82.³⁶

A number of small related tapestry panels and cushion covers dating from around 1600 depict scenes from the life of Christ: the Victoria and Albert Museum holds two versions of the Flight into Egypt (fig. 2.6) and one of Christ and the Woman of Samaria, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York has a cushion cover of the Annunciation, the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi under a triple colonnade (fig. 2.7), and the Circumcision of Christ.³⁷ They have been identified as the work of Ralph Sheldon’s looms at Barcheston in Warwickshire. Ralph Sheldon was another member of the liminal Roman Catholic community who secured major commissions from members of the aristocracy at the same time as he was being accused of involvement with the most infamous Catholic plots of his day. It was Ralph’s father, William of Beoly, who, according to Dugdale, ‘first brought the art of weaving into England, at his own expense’, his reasons for establishing his weaving business being to ‘provide employment for the people on his lands, and to keep money in the country which was being sent abroad’.³⁸ The design and execution of the fledgling native art of Sheldon

³⁵ William Weston, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, trans. by Philip Caraman (London: Longmans, Green 1955), pp. 76-77, cited in John Harley, *William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1997), p. 80.

³⁶ Staffordshire Record Office, D603/K/1/7/5; D603/K/1/6/34, cited in Harley, p. 62.

³⁷ Wells-Cole identifies the source for these tapestries as *l’ita Divae Mariae Virginis*, fifteen prints of the Life of the Virgin engraved by Hieronymus Wierix and published in the 1580s by Hans van Luyck (Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, p. 229). The cushion covers, Wells-Cole notes, ‘have a distinctly Counter-Reformation character’, and he recognises them as falling into a category of output apart, but nonetheless he argues that they ‘are likely to post-date the relaxation of Elizabethan restrictions on the type of religious subject matter acceptable in England’ (p. 234).

³⁸ ‘*primus in Angliam suo sumptu tapeta texendi artem advexit*’, William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated: From Records, Leiger-Books, Manuscripts, Charters, Evidences, Tombes, and Armes*, 2nd edn, rev. by W. Thomas, 2 vols (London: [Osborn and Longman], 1730), i, p. 584; A.

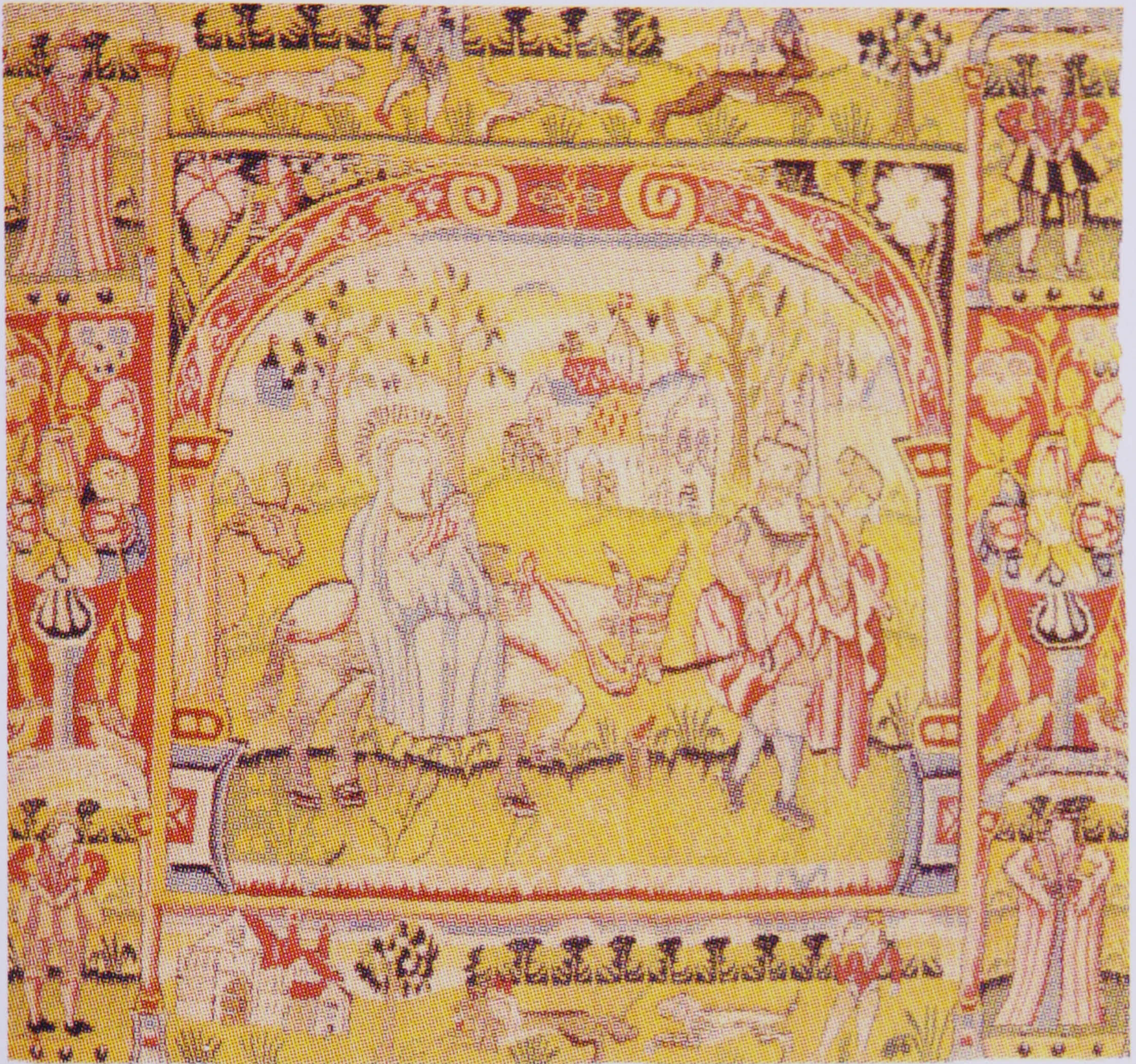


Fig. 2.6 Sheldon cushion cover depicting Flight into Egypt. 16th c (Victoria and Albert Museum)



Fig. 2.7 Sheldon long cushion cover depicting Annunciation, Adoration of Shepherds and Adoration of Kings. 16th c (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

was highly sophisticated, as has been recognised by recent research: the Barcheston looms produced armorial tapestries for such elite clients as the Burghleys at Hatfield House and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (fig. 2.8).³⁹ Sheldon was the only maker in England from whom aristocratic families could commission high quality armorial hangings to further their own iconographical programmes.

Ralph Sheldon had converted to Roman Catholicism at or around the time of his marriage to Anne Throckmorton (daughter of Sir Robert) in 1557. He built a chantry chapel where he worshipped regularly according to the Catholic rite. Official documents during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I record his recusancy and his keeping of Marian priests, for which he was imprisoned in the Marshalsea.⁴⁰ His place in the Midlands Catholic community was strengthened by a network of marriages. Katherine Willington, one of Ralph Sheldon's maternal aunts, married William Catesby and was grandmother to the gunpowder plotter Robert. The Catesby and Sheldon families were very close: Ralph Sheldon together with his son Edward Sheldon of Barton, Oxfordshire and John Throckmorton of Lypiatt, Gloucestershire were among the lenders when Robert Catesby found himself forced to raise mortgages on his residence Chastleton House in 1598-1600.⁴¹ Catesby's finances received a mortal blow when he was fined 4,000 marks for his part in the Essex Rebellion of 1601, and the following year Catesby and the mortgagees sold the house to Sheldon's friend Walter

F. Kendrick, 'The Hatfield Tapestries of the Seasons', *Walpole Society*, 2 (1912-13), 86-97 (p. 87).

³⁹ See Jane Clark, 'A Set of Tapestries of Leicester House in the Strand: 1585', *Burlington Magazine*, 125 (1983), 283-84; Anthony Wells-Cole, 'Some Design Sources for the Earl of Leicester's Tapestries and Other Contemporary Pieces', *Burlington Magazine*, 125 (1983), 284-85; and Anthony Wells-Cole, 'The Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestry Maps', *Burlington Magazine*, 132 (1990), 392-401. For a discussion of the emblematic nature of Sheldon tapestries see Peter Daly, 'England and the Emblem', pp. 16-20. The Sheldon output as a whole is documented in John Humphreys, *Elizabethan Sheldon Tapestries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929).

⁴⁰ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, n.s. ed. by John Roche Dasent, (London: HMSO, 1891), III: 1580-1581, pp. 254, 301-02.

⁴¹ Anon, *Chastleton House* (London: National Trust, 1997), pp. 45-47.



Fig. 2.8 Sheldon armorial tapestry woven for Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Wool and silk, 1584-85 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Jones. The Sheldon looms were certainly producing proscribed iconographical material for Catholic clients at this time, possibly for Ralph Sheldon's friends and the Midlands Catholic community. That the names of the original clients for the small New Testament cushions have been lost should come as no surprise, given the close-knit nature of the community and the necessary secrecy with which they practised their faith. Anthony Wells-Cole suggests that two cushion-covers dating from around 1600 showing scenes from the life of Christ and bearing the initials T and E. I. were 'woven for a member of the Jones family of Chastleton'.⁴²

Walter Jones pulled down Catesby's house in 1603, and rebuilding was completed in 1614. The Catholic sympathies in the house continued, however; one of the lavishly-furnished state rooms is referred to as 'Mr Sheldon's Chamber' in a 1633 inventory, and Sheldon wove a set of tapestries of the Story of Judah and the Judgement of Paris for Jones's house in Worcester which were cut and adapted for Chastleton.⁴³ A book of devotional poems dated 1634 was found in the shaft of the butler's lift behind the library, and there are several Catholic paintings in the house dating from the late sixteenth century. There are portraits of three of the four Doctors of the Western Church, St Gregory the Great, St Augustine and St Jerome, 'probably by a local sign-painter, perhaps for some Recusant family (the Sheldons?)', and the fourth is a late sixteenth century *Penitent Magdalen*, 'possibly another religious picture crudely painted from a print by some local sign-painter for a Recusant family'.⁴⁴ The Great Hall is decorated with a frieze of 'the twelve Old Testament prophets and their pagan and

⁴² Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Influence of Continental Prints, 1558-1625* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 229. Walter Jones' wife was Eleanor Pope, daughter of the Keeper of the Queen's Jewel-house.

⁴³ *Chastleton House*, pp. 27, 25. One example has been loaned back to Chastleton by the Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

⁴⁴ *Chastleton House*, pp. 13, 22.

female counterparts, who were the sibyls of antiquity'. Inscribed with their names, these were understood to be Christian metonyms: the Phrygian sibyl signified 'Our Lord shall rise again', the Delphic sibyl signified the crown of thorns, the Hellespontian sibyl holding three ears of corn signed to the three nails of Christ Crucified, and so on. There is no evidence to prove that the Chastleton prophets and sibyls were other than a fashionable decorative cycle, similar to the 1612 apostles and prophets in the chapel gallery roundels at Hatfield House, but within the local Catholic circles they might have hinted at a further meaning.

It is not known whether the authorities knew that alongside his highly visible commissions from members of the Elizabethan establishment Sheldon also produced proscribed images. His personal links of friendship and kinship with families such as the Throckmortons and Catesbys suggest that private commissions could have been undertaken with a relatively low profile, and the New Testament pieces which have come down to us are all small-scale. The images which were woven by the wealthy and well-connected Catholic Sheldon onto these small, domestically-scaled pieces had their grander counterparts in those textiles and paintings – some devotional images – which lined the walls of the Earl of Northampton's house for all his guests to see. Even during the period before 1620, when according to Catholic historian John Bossy 'the risk of fines and sequestration of property was rapidly declining', and 'methods of more or less amicable composition for recusancy were being evolved which would become general practice during the following reign', practical tolerance was in some cases possible.⁴⁵ The relative immunity enjoyed by such people as Howard, Sheldon and Byrd is perhaps

⁴⁵ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community: 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), p. 158.

an indication of the prevailing conditions in which vestments could be kept and masses said by the outlawed Jesuit missionaries could exist within the London prisons, even during an era of vicious persecution.

II: The Queen of Scots: '*Marie Stuart, Tu as Martyre*'⁴⁶

As a Catholic needlewoman, the case of Mary Stuart is an unusual one in that a certain amount of the needlework she executed during her 19-year period of captivity survives, and there are detailed descriptions from several sources of other works which are no longer extant. Much of this needlework has a bearing on Mary's Catholicism, directly or indirectly. As the young Queen of France, Mary donated some of her gowns to the church to be cut up and used to appliqué vestments.⁴⁷ This merging of church and state trappings of power described an almost palimpsestic relationship in which Mary Stuart dressed the church in her own image, inscribing the liturgical ornaments with the textiles which proclaimed her divinely-appointed monarchy. Mary later reversed the process in Scotland, when of the 'ten pece of caippes chasubles & tunicles all of claith of gold & thre of them figurit with red and the rest with quhite & yallow' recorded in the 'Queens Movables, 1562', 'mair took for hir self ain cape a chasuble four tunicles ['All brokin & cuttit in her awin presence'] to mak a bed for the King'.⁴⁸ Here, Mary Stuart is recorded making an intimate association between religious textiles and her political self. In later life she continued this practice, and it is with the religious discourses of Mary's needlework during her imprisonment that I am here concerned.

⁴⁶ An anagram adopted by Mary as a device on her first widowhood, according to Antonia Fraser, *Mary, Queen of Scots* (London: Mandarin, 1989), p. 488. Much of the discussion in this section is developed from material first considered in 'Embroidering a Royal Identity'.

⁴⁷ Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ Cited without further reference in Wingfield-Digby, p. 56.

i: Execution-as-Martyrdom

On 8 February 1587, when she was just eight hours away from death, Mary Stuart wrote her last letter, to her brother-in-law Henri III of France:

*La religion catholique et le maintien du droit que Dieu m'a donné à ceste couronne sont les deux points de ma condamnation, et toutesfois ils ne me veulent permettre de dire que c'est pour la religion catholique que je meurs.*⁴⁹

Condemned for her Catholic faith and for upholding her divine right to the English throne, Mary was forbidden to proclaim the fact that she died a martyr.⁵⁰ But I would argue that she found alternative ways to publicise her martyrdom, and that she used her needlework as one element in a complex programme designed for this specific aim. The issues raised by a survey of this programme will be used here to decode aspects of Mary Stuart's needlework.

The first text that provides a useful parallel to a discussion of Mary's needlework is the so-called Sheffield Portrait (fig. 2.9). An inscription in gold reads: *'Maria, D. G. Scotiae, Piissima Regina, Franciae Dotaria, Anno Aetatis Regniq[ue] 36, Anglicae*

⁴⁹ 'The Catholic faith and my upholding the right to this crown that God has given me are the two points on which I am condemned, and nonetheless they will not allow me to say that it is for the Catholic faith that I die' (Labanoff, VI, pp. 492-93). This attitude contrasts starkly with that of 18 years previously, when as far as the relationship between her faith and her captivity was concerned, Mary believed she faced only the prohibition of practising Catholicism, and spoke only of dying *in* her faith rather than *for* it. She begged her sister-in-law and cousin Elizabeth of Spain to '*asurés en le Roi, que je mouray en la religion cattolique romaine, quoy que l'on en dise,*' ('assure people that I will die in the Roman Catholic faith, whatever people say'), and declaring she would never convert to '*leur religion meschante*' ('their base religion'), because '*quoy qu'oyés dire, assurés-vous que je ne changeray d'opinion, bien que par force je m'accomode au tempes*' ('whatever you hear people say, be assured that I will never change my mind, although I am forced to accommodate myself to the times') (letter dated 24 September 1568, in Labanoff, II, p. 185). Early on in her captivity the discourses of Mary's needlework focused primarily on proclaiming her virtuous character (see 'Embroidering a Royal Identity', pp. 37-45).

⁵⁰ Others proclaimed this for her, and Robert Southwell even puts the words into her mouth in 'Decease-Release': 'Alive a Queene, now dead I am a Sainte: | Once [Mary] calld, my name nowe Martyr is;' *The Poems of Robert Southwell, S. J.*, ed. by James H. Macdonald and Nancy Pollard Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 47-48 (l. 13). See also below, p. 360.

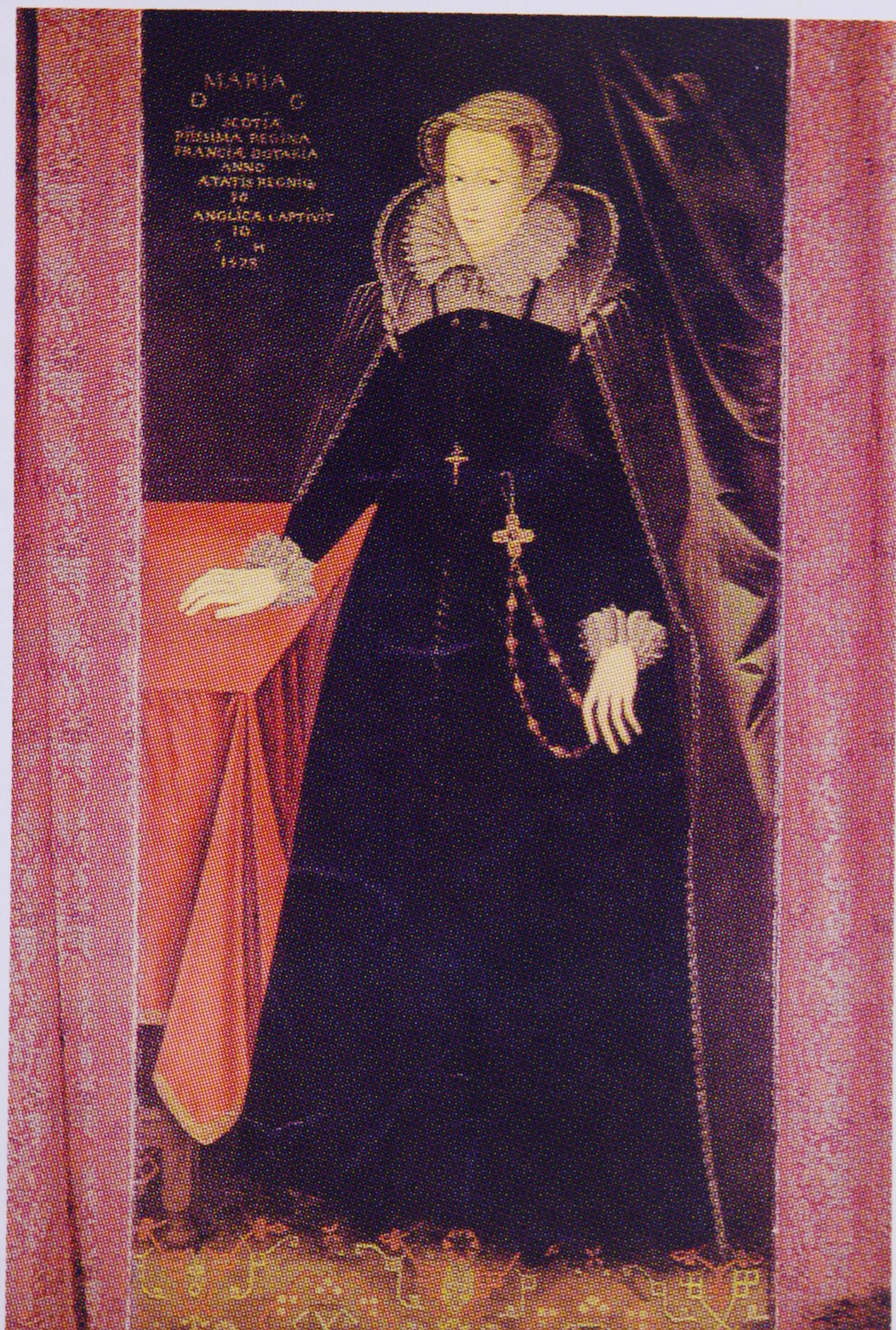


Fig. 2.9 P. Oudry (?): Sheffield Portrait of Mary Queen of Scots

Captivit 10, S. H. 1578'.⁵¹ The inscription highlights Mary's Catholic piety, and refutes her enforced abdication and the unjust accusations which had resulted, at the date of the portrait, in her 10-year captivity.

This message is clearly read in Mary's accoutrements and stance. The sober and pious nature of the widow is signalled by her black dress and its jet ornaments, relieved only by white lace ruffles at the wrist and neck, a white partlett, a full-length collared veil and a white lace cap. The nineteenth-century art historian Sir George Scharf describes her jewellery, unfortunately not visible in detail in the figure:

a finely patterned necklace of black beads, interlacing in geometric lines, and forming an open net-work, with the well-known device of Mary, composed of two letters 'M' combined, one up and the other down, and a small black crown pendant in the centre [...] A richly wrought chain, apparently of polished metal, is festooned across the upper part of her black dress, and hangs low down in front. From a plain black riband passing around her neck is suspended at her breast a small crucifix, consisting of a yellow cross, terminating almost in a point, and the figure of our Lord in flesh colour extended upon it.' The portrait's main narrative attention is focused by the fingers of the Queen's right hand pulling at the end of a rosary: 'A larger cross [...] is attached to the dark chain on her left side. This cross is of a Latin form, with a Gothic letter 'S' on each of the golden limb [sic] and a disc in the centre, surrounded by a border with the words ANGVSTIAE VNDIQUE upon it.'⁵² In the centre are three figures, a female between two men, one of them wearing a scarlet robe, and the group undoubtedly represents Susannah and the Elders, which together with the surrounding motto, bore significant allusion to the Queen's peculiar situation. To this cross is attached a rosary, consisting of richly-ornamented beads, some of gold and others of

⁵¹ 'Mary, by the Grace of God most pious Queen of Scotland, Dowager of France, in the year of her age and reign, 36. of her English captivity, 10'.

⁵² 'Troubles on every side'.

dark material patterned red.⁵³

The story of Susannah, wife of Joachim, is told in the Greek version of Daniel 13. Two elders with whom she refused to commit adultery falsely accused Susannah of committing adultery with a younger man. As a metaphor for Mary's case, the two elders could refer to the accusations against her of carnal adultery, and/or of spiritual adultery with '*leur religion méchant*'. Susannah, like Mary at the conference of York in 1568 that examined the infamous casket letters, was denied the right to speak in her own defence. But in the portrait this story does not merely repudiate the slander Mary shared with her model. It is given a specifically religious significance by superimposing the reference onto a crucifix. The Susannah crucifix thus forms a narrative pair with the crucified Christ suspended above Mary's heart and the motto *angustiae undique* becomes that of a martyr.⁵⁴

⁵³ Scharf's notes are reprinted by Lionel Cust in *Notes on the Authentic Portraits of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Murray, 1903), p. 72. An interesting variant on the Sheffield portrait is the 'Morton' portrait, executed possibly thirty years after the Sheffield portrait, and possibly in Scotland. Its purpose is studiously to overwrite the portrayal of Mary-as-Susannah, the upholder of her faith, the martyr falsely accused:

All decorations of a devotional character, and all religious emblems, are omitted. We see here neither cross nor crucifix. No black necklace with the interlocked letters 'M' lies under the ruff. Instead of a black drop to the earring a pearl is suspended. [...] Instead of the small crucifix [...] she here has a large square plate of ruby red, surrounded by a border of pearls attached to a narrow chain of red and gold. Her right hand is raised, holding between the thumb and forefinger a large pearl hanging from the square plate of ruby red (Cust, pp. 85-86).

This later image concentrates on recuperating Mary's secular chastity in the Scottish Protestant context, obliterating uncomfortable visual references to her religious 'heresy' and holding up the sign of her chastity which surely is more for the benefit of James' reputation than for her own, posthumous by twenty years.

⁵⁴ Mary's wardrobe consisted entirely of black (or very dark) gowns, a colour which, for her as well as for her mother-in-law Catherine de' Medici, signified constancy, but which in Mary's case may be reappraised in the light of the Sheffield portrait's iconography and Mary's repeated insistence in her letters of her eternal Catholicism, as figuring constancy in faith. Mary's wardrobe is itemised in an inventory of jewels and other effects in the hands of the servants of Mary Stuart taken on 20 February 1586 at Chartley Hall (Labanoff, VII, pp. 231-39). Twelve of Mary's fourteen gowns are black, and she left more than a dozen cloaks, all black bar one. Swain believes the wardrobe 'shows clearly the changed fortunes of the Queen [...] who was a middle-aged, ailing woman who wore warm and sombre clothes' (*The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots*, p. 90). Mary seems indeed have been as Swain describes her – but one only has to recall Catherine de' Medici's sartorial programme overwriting the iconography of her late husband's mistress (see above, p. 138, and below, p. 373n) to imagine that Mary's wardrobe could also have been visually more significant than Swain's reading suggests.

The iconography of this portrait clearly emphasises above all else Mary's Catholicism, and although she was to spend a further nine years in captivity before her execution, the iconography also leans towards a suggestion of possible martyrdom. Once it became clear that execution was probable if not certain, Mary determined that hers was not to be a shameful death behind closed doors which her executioners could easily use as propaganda: '*Je prie Vostre Majesté,*' she wrote to Elizabeth I in November 1586, addressing her as from a great distance, in contrast to earlier letters directed to her 'good sister and cousin', '*que je ne sois point suppliciée en quelque lieu caché, mais à la veue de mes domestiques et autres personnes qui puissent rendre tesmoignage de ma foy et de mon obéyssance envers la vraye Église.*'⁵⁵ With this letter Mary was laying the foundations for her execution to be read as martyrdom, ensuring the presence of witnesses who could testify to her death for, and not just in, her Catholic faith.

Along with written requests to her servants and supporters to witness her martyrdom, Mary made a number of official statements that formalised the shape she wanted her ultimate persona to take. Her last letter to Elizabeth I, dated 19 December 1586, reads like the creed or litany of a martyr. In it, she categorically stated her '*constante résolution de souffrir la mort pour le maintien, obéissance et auctorité de L'Eglise cattolique apostolique et romaine*'.⁵⁶ Mary's last Will and Testament, dated 7 February 1587, the day before her execution, sets her seal on the matter: '*Protestant premier de mourir en la foy cattolique, apostolique et romaine*' – her concern is that her faith

Mary's wardrobe may also be read as a part of her own programme to construct herself as a martyr.

⁵⁵ 'I beg your Majesty that I not be executed in a hidden place, but in the sight of my servants and other persons who may bear witness to my faith and my faithfulness to the True Church' (Labanoff, VI, p. 445).

⁵⁶ 'Unshakeable resolution to suffer death for upholding and obeying the authority of the Roman, Catholic and apostolic church' (Labanoff, VI, pp. 475-76).

should be seen to be the unique cause for which she lives, and dies.⁵⁷

The martyrdom of that faith was to be seen and witnessed on the stage that was the Great Hall of Fotheringhay castle. For the public spectacle, Mary prepared a blazon in her choice of clothing, exiting this life clothed from head to foot in the liturgical colour of martyrdom. As she undressed for her execution (fig. 2.10) the spectators saw that underneath her customary black clothes (similar to those described in the Sheffield portrait above) she wore a red satin petticoat and bodice, and to these she added a pair of red sleeves handed to her by one of her gentlewomen. Although this strong visual statement was impossible to overwrite, the State was very anxious that the relics of a martyr were not created. Mary's own servants were initially to be debarred from the great hall of Fotheringhay Castle where the execution was to take place, as they 'might easily attempt to dip their napkins in her blood for relics which, Kent said grimly, "were not convenient"'. Her body, after execution, was

lain unceremoniously in the presence chamber [...] wrapped in the coarse woollen covering of her own billiard table. The bloodstained block was burnt. Every other particle of clothing or object of devotion which might be associated with the Queen of Scots was burnt, scoured or washed, so that not a trace of her blood might remain to create a holy relic to inspire devotion in years to come.⁵⁸

Even her internal organs were removed and buried in a secret place in Fotheringhay. But despite these scrupulous precautions, testamentary bequests reinforced Mary's programme.

Amongst Mary Stuart's possessions at her death was 'furniture for a bedd wrought with

⁵⁷ 'Declaring first that I die in the Roman, Catholic and apostolic faith' (Labanoff, vi, p. 486).

⁵⁸ Fraser, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, pp. 630, 635-36.

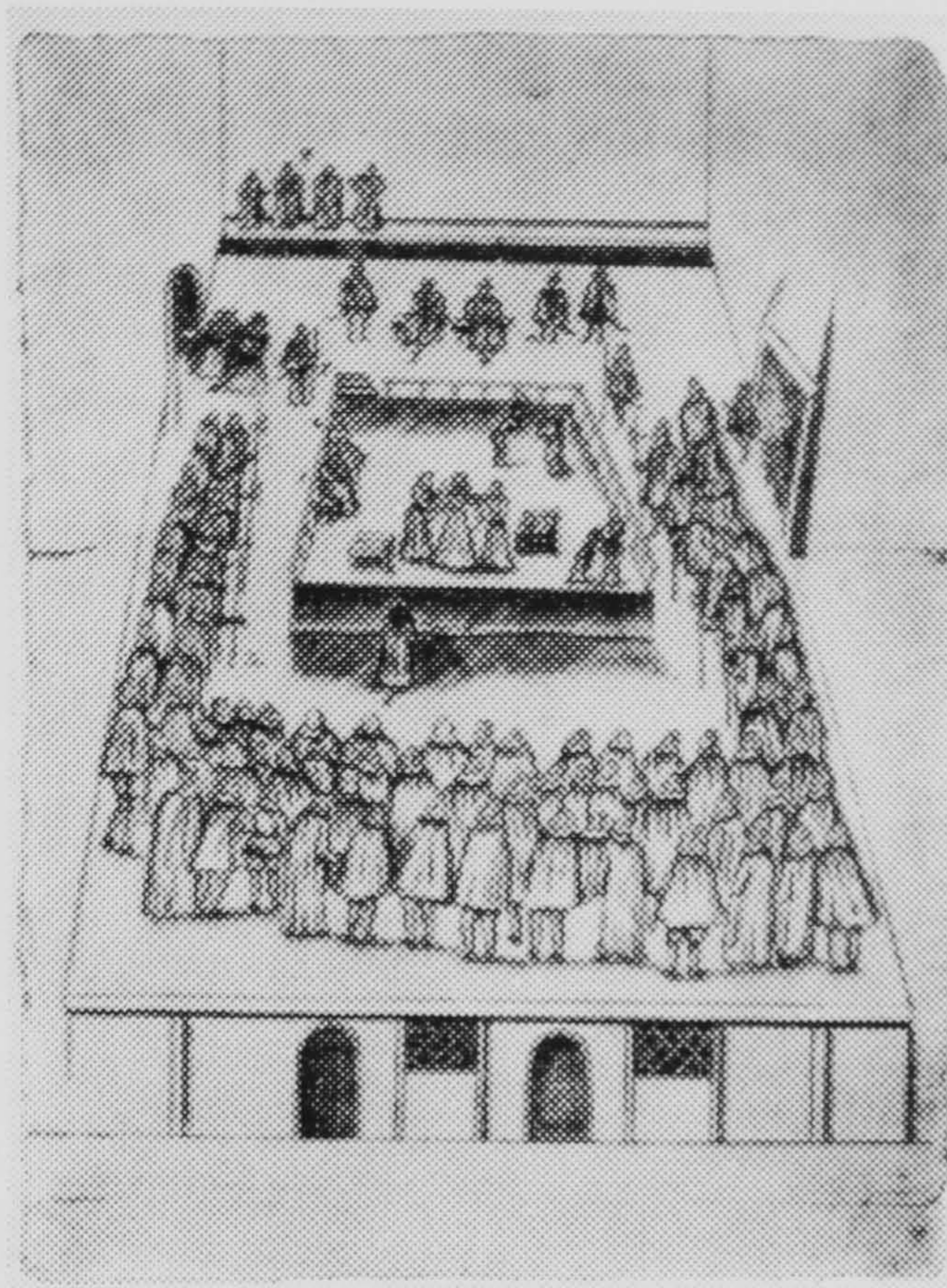


Fig. 2.10 Contemporary sketch of Great Hall in Fotheringhay Castle, 8 February 1587, showing Mary Stuart entering (left) and disrobing (centre) (British Museum)

needle woork, of silke, silver and golde, with divers devices and armes, not throughlye finished [...] to be delivered [...] to the King of Scottes'.⁵⁹ This is believed to be the bed of state described in detail by William Drummond of Hawthornden in a letter to Ben Jonson, written thirty years after Mary's death. According to Drummond, the bed was made up of '*Impressaes* and Emblemes [...] wrought and embroidered all with gold and silk by the late Queen *Mary*'.⁶⁰ If this was indeed the bed 'to be delivered to the King of Scottes', and was unfinished at the time of the Queen's death, it may have been an element in her final programme, designed or assembled by Mary in the final years of captivity for the particular purpose of presenting a coherent persona at state level. Given the bed's state function, all the emblems described by Drummond may be assumed to contribute individually to Mary's sovereign claim. A bed of state is in itself a significant testamentary gift to make to her son, for it is the official site of royal procreation, and the many personal emblems and imprese of Mary's royal relations included on the bed constitute a genealogical table of a veritable royal dynasty, visible signs of the divine right to monarchy passing from generation to generation through the bloodline.

On the bed 'an *Impressa* of *Mary of Lorrain* her Mother', stands for this process: 'a *Phoenix* in flames, the word *en ma fin gît mon commencement*' ('in my end is my beginning') (p. 208). As the personal emblem of Mary's mother, the phoenix and its embroidered motto emphasise the line of succession through Mary to James. This theme is emphasised in another emblem 'for herself and her Son, a Big Lyon and a young Whelp beside her, the word, *unum quidem sed Leonem*' ('one only, but a lion')

⁵⁹ Listed in the Chartley inventory, in Labanoff, VII, p. 254.

⁶⁰ Drummond's letter to Ben Jonson is cited in full in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), I, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (1925), pp. 208-10 (p. 208). Subsequent references are given in the text.

(p. 208). The phoenix carries connotations not only of the physical aspects of divinely-sanctioned royal inheritance, but also its spiritual aspect: the phoenix is the symbol which above all signifies the immortal Christ, whose corporeal death was required to bring life to his church. It may imply that Mary, as monarch and *imago dei*, makes the same kind of sacrifice in the true faith for her country and for those who reign after her in her image. The phoenix appropriates, proleptically, Mary's own execution and reformulates it as a mystical, victorious event and Mary herself as the deathless, self-regenerating fount of all life.

Mary Stuart herself appears in a panel of 'a Crucifix, before which with all her Royall Ornaments she is humbled on her knees most lively, with the word *undique*' ('everywhere') (p. 208). The regalia constitute a semiotic system in themselves, but, pictured bearing them, Mary reclaims the additional iconic function of the state portraits which were denied her during captivity.⁶¹ The crucifix asserts divine sanction of her rule, and the motto *undique* could refer both to the omnipresence of God and to Mary's indissoluble sovereignty, untainted by English captivity. Mary's own impresa, 'the Loadstone turning towards the pole, the word, her Majesties name turned in an Anagram, *Maria Stuart, sa vertu m'attire*' ('his/her virtue draws me'), not only figures her virtue drawn to God or attracting others to itself, but by polysemy it achieves the same superimposition of church and state power in the person of Mary (p. 208). The phoenix in flames (which also appears as a single panel on the Marian hanging, fig. 2.11, no. 3 on the key accompanying the illustration of the complete hanging, fig. M.9)) may also be read in this way, referring simultaneously to the uniqueness of the Queen

⁶¹ Mary endeavoured nonetheless to obtain such portraits. 'There are some of my friends in this country who ask for my portrait,' she wrote to James Beaton, Archbishop of Glasgow. 'I pray you, have four of these made, which must be set in gold, and sent to me secretly, and as soon as possible.' There is no evidence this request was ever successfully complied with (cited in Cust, pp. 67-68).



Fig. 2.11 Mary Stuart: 'Phenix' panel, Marian hanging

and the Virgin Mary.⁶²

This reading is strengthened by the Marian hanging panel showing Mary's personal impresa of a marigold turning towards the sun with the motto, *Non inferiora secutus* ('not following lower things') (fig. 2.12), taken from an emblem in Paradin (fig. 2.13). On the Marian hanging this recognised floral emblem of the Virgin appears in combination with crossed 'M' ciphers often used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to indicate the Virgin Mary on church embroideries.⁶³ The 'cressent' of Henri II appeared on the bed, sourced from Paradin's *Devises Heroïques* (fig. 2.14), where it is glossed as signifying '*l'Eglise militante, laquelle ne peut demourer long temps en un estat, que maintenant ne soit soutenuë & defendue des Princes catholiques, & tantot persecutée des tirans & heretiques*'.⁶⁴ Paradin goes on to elaborate: '*le Royale Magesté, ou le Roy premier fils de l'Eglise promet de tenir main de proteccion, iusques à ce que reduite sous un Dieu, un Roy, & un Loy*'.⁶⁵ Similarly, and more significantly in the context of martyrdom, Paradin explains that another family device included on the Bed of State was that of Godfrey of Boulogne showing three birds transfixéd on an arrow (fig. 2.15), representing '*sa future grandeur & autorité & creacion en Roy dudit Hierusalem*'.⁶⁶ This reference perhaps even leans toward a Christ-like metaphor: Mary

⁶² In the first third of the seventeenth century both meanings were current: Henry Godyere recorded that 'the Queen is compared to a phoenix, for she is matchless, unparalleled, and unique' (*The Mirrour of Majesty; or, The Badge of Honour* (London: [n.pub.], 1618), no. 3 (cited in Diehl, *Index*, p. 162). Henry Hawkins, in the Jesuit emblem book *Parthenia Sacra* ([Rouen], Cousturier, 1633; repr. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), describes the Virgin as '*One Virgin-Mother, Phenix of her kind*' (p. 263).

⁶³ For the marigold as an emblem of the Virgin see Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 156, and fig. W.23 below. For crossed M ciphers denoting the Virgin, see Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ 'The church militant, which cannot remain long in one state, for now it is not supported and defended by Catholic Princes, and is so greatly persecuted by tyrants and heretics.', Claude Paradin, *Devises Heroïques*, 2nd edn (Lyons: Tournes and Gazeau, 1557; repr. Aldershot: Scolar, 1989), pp. 20-21.

⁶⁵ 'The Royal Majesty, or the King, the first son of the Church, promises to extend his hand in protection until this brings it back under one God, one King and one Law'.

⁶⁶ 'His future grandeur and authority when he is created king of the said Jerusalem' (Paradin, p. 38).



Fig. 2.12 Mary Stuart: '*Non Inferiora Secutus*' octagon panel, Marian hanging



Fig. 2.13 '*Non inferiora secutus*' emblem, Paradin, *Devises Heroiques*

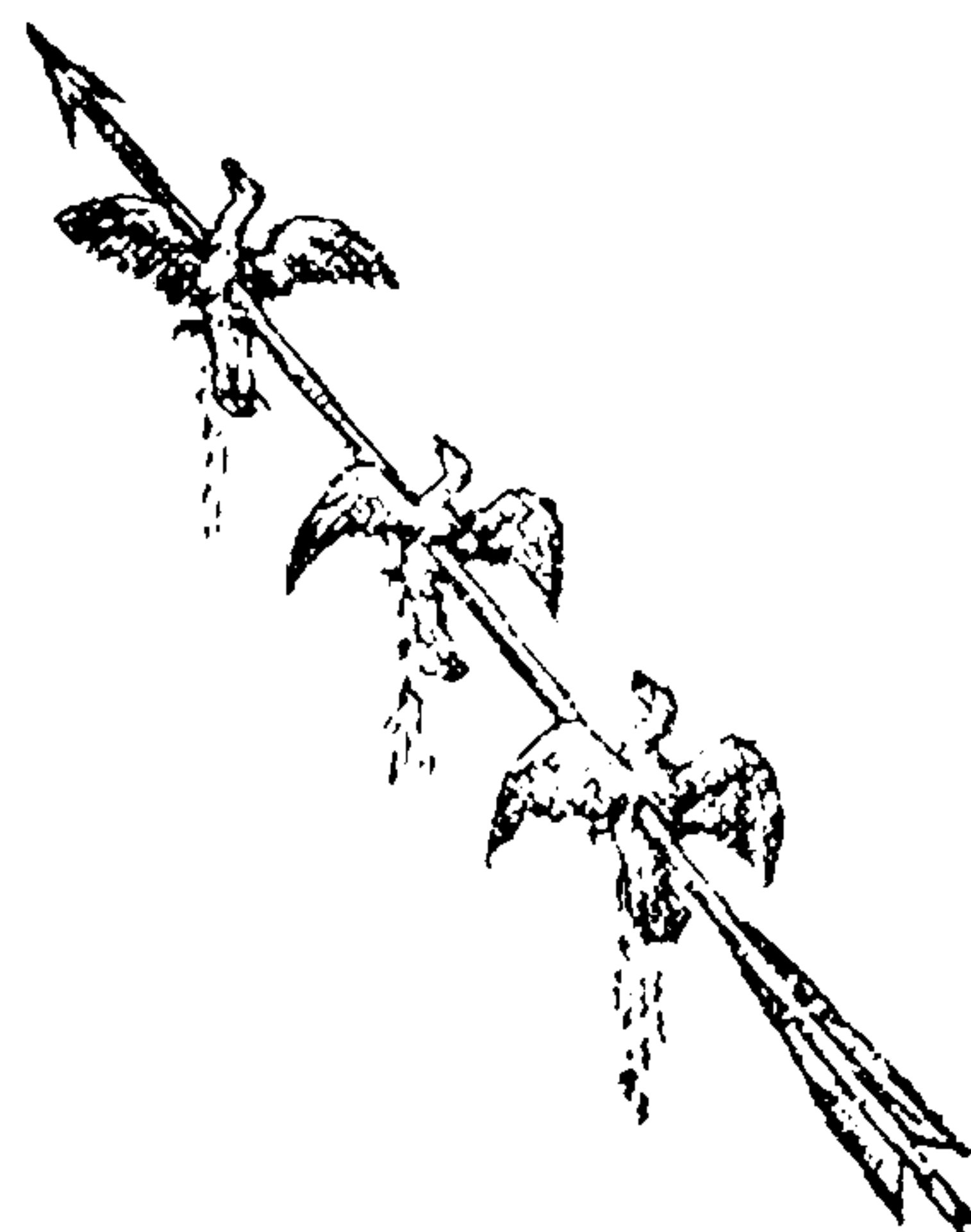
Donec totum impleat orbem.



La Denise à present du Treschretien & victorieux Roy Henri II. de ce nom, est la Lune en son croissant: Es sacrees escritures donques la Lune prefigure l'Eglise, quasi en tous passages, à quoy se conforme l'histoire recitée par Paul Emil du Pape Calixte II. (au paravant apellé Guy, fils de Guillaume Conte de Bourgogne,) lequel la nuit precedent sa creacion, eut vision d'un ieune enfant qui lui apporta & mit une Lune sur le giron. La Lune aussi est sujette à mutacions, croissant & décroissant de tems en tems: ainsi veritablement est l'Eglise

Fig. 2.14 'Donec totum impleat orbem' emblem, Paradin, *Devises Heroiques*.

Dederitne viam casus'ue Deus'ue.



Croniques de
Lorraine.

Le moniment & enseigne de la Vertu, noblesse, & antiquité de la maison de Lorraine, sont les trois Alerions qui se trouverent en la flesche de Godefroy de Buillon, au siege de Hierusalem: laquelle le noble Prince avoit tiré contre la Tour de David. Presage (selon l'histoire) de sa future grandeur & autorité, & creacion en Roy dudit Hierusalem. Et pour d'icelui estre descendue la susdite maison de Lorraine icelle continue de porter l'image desdits trois Alerions en sa monnoye, iusques à present.

Fig. 2.15 'Dederitne viam casus'ue Deus'ue' emblem, Paradin, *Devises Heroiques*.

claims for herself the notion of the throne of Jerusalem, fusing this persona with that of the King of the Christian church, Christ. In this context a monogrammed 'pellican', which appears on the Marian hanging (no. 9) to the right of an octagon above the central panel bearing the monogrammed letters Elizabeth/Mary, is a common emblem of Christ. Feeding its children on the blood from its own breast, the pelican in her piety suggests the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, as well as the sacrifice Mary makes as literal mother for her son.

These needleworked emblems indicate that Mary Stuart deliberately articulated her Catholic faith in her needlework towards the end of her life in order to create a public persona for herself as a martyr. But faith had always been an issue in her captivity, and was consequentially also a continuous thread running through the semiotics of her embroidery throughout her time in England.

ii: Divinely-sanctioned Treason

During the first years of Mary's imprisonment, secret negotiations for a marriage between herself and the Catholic peer Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk were in train.⁶⁷ When Elizabeth discovered these plans in 1569, Norfolk was immediately sent to the Tower. Mary was removed to Tutbury, surveillance was increased, and communications with the outside world were reduced. When Norfolk was freed in 1570, a far more dangerous plot was devised, masterminded by an Italian banker in London, Roberto Ridolfi, which aimed at an invasion of England by the Spanish army in the Netherlands to topple Elizabeth and put Mary Stuart on the throne in her stead with

⁶⁷ Mary's marriage negotiations with Norfolk and the Ridolfi plot are discussed by Fraser in Chapter 21 of *Mary, Queen of Scots*, pp. 484-509.

Norfolk as consort. It is uncertain how much Mary was involved in the details of the plot, but when Elizabeth's secret services began to learn of the affair, Norfolk was arrested again and sent to the Tower in September 1571. Mary's envoy, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, was discovered to be one of the main conspirators corresponding with Ridolfi. Under threat of torture he gave damning evidence against both Norfolk and Mary in an examination on 6 November 1571, and Norfolk was executed for his part in this plot in June 1572. In his evidence, Leslie described a panel of emblematic needlework made by Mary intended to exhort Norfolk and his allies to depose Elizabeth, and put Mary on the throne. It was, said Leslie, subsequently delivered to Norfolk in the form of a 'Cushyn wrought with the Scotts Quene's own Armes, and a Devyse upon it, with this Sentence, VIRESCIT VULNERE VIRTUS, and a Hand with a Knyfe cuttynge downe the Vynes, as they use in the Sprynge Tyme; al which Work was made by the Scotts Quene's own hand'.⁶⁸ The emblem depicts a hand pruning the unfruitful branch of a vine so that the fruitful branch may flourish, the motto signifying 'Virtue flourishes by wounding'.

The panel, or a copy of it, survives as the centrepiece of the so-called Marian hanging, its composition complex and meticulously organised (fig. 2.16). The 'Norfolk Panel' is arranged in two symmetrical halves, divided by the hand with the pruning hook. The left-hand side with the unfruitful, pruned branch represents the barren Elizabeth, and the right, the fertile Mary, symbolised by the fruit-bearing branch. The motto scrolls across horizontally. The vine is set in a stylised landscape, many emblematic features of which, organised around the same principle of symmetry, develop the central theme, fertility to the right and sterility to the left. This theme, crucial to a discussion of

⁶⁸ de Zulueta, p. 7, citing Murdin, *State Papers*, pp. 46 and 50, without further reference.



Fig. 2.16 Mary Stuart: Norfolk Panel, Marian hanging (Oxburgh Hall)

relations between Mary and Elizabeth I, will be discussed at greater length in the case study to the final Chapter. I propose to focus here exclusively on the Norfolk panel's emblematic signification as far as it treats the issue of religion.

Decoding the panel's religious signification starts with two buildings standing on the horizon to the immediate right and left of the cutting hand (fig. 2.17). On the right a church flying a flag from its steeple depicting a cross makes the claim of the Catholic church to legitimacy on the fruitful side of the building. Mirroring this building on the left is a windmill with a tiny man beside it. The *OED* lists 'windmill' as being in use in about 1644 to mean 'variable, flighty' and hence 'to turn or change direction like a windmill'.⁶⁹ Standing over the sterile branch as the church stands over the fruitful one, the windmill may be read out as signifying Protestantism's 'flighty' break with Catholicism. This interpretation implicates Henry VIII as the instigator of the heresy, and recalls the Catholic view that Elizabeth's accession was illegitimate.⁷⁰ The figure by the windmill is a pan figure playing a pipe, and with the shaggy legs of a goat.⁷¹ Ripa, following Horapollo, uses the image of a stag charmed by the music of a pipe in '*Adulationes*' to indicate a man deceived by flattery, a possible reference to the false seductiveness of Protestantism.⁷² And, indeed, a stag lies amongst the sterile branches under the pruning hook, close to the windmill and the pipe-playing satyr.

⁶⁹ *OED* sense 6.c.

⁷⁰ In the spring of 1570 Pope Pious V had issued a papal Bull, *Regnans in excelsis*, which officially excommunicated Elizabeth and released all her subjects from their loyalty to her.

⁷¹ If this figure is indeed a Pan-figure it may, in compositional opposition to the 'true' church, represent Protestantism as a pagan religion.

⁷² Cesare Ripa Perugino, *Iconologia*, ed. by Piero Buscardini (Padua: Tozzi, 1618; repr. Turin: Fogola, 1988), p. 33. The stag was also a Renaissance symbol of worldliness. The boar was used by Mary as emblematic of Disdain (see below, pp. 366, 368); here it may signify lechery and wantonness, the perverted extreme of the fertility theme. In this regard the hare too is a recurring image in the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth, applied by Mary to Elizabeth and signifying wantonness.



Fig. 2.17 Detail of Norfolk Panel

The hand holding the pruning hook descends from a heavenly cloud, as though treason were sanctioned by divine intervention in support of the Catholic church. The hook appears to issue from the door of the 'true' church, beginning a diagonal line cutting across the symmetry of the design that the composition extends to encompass the word '*virtus*' and a butterfly on the right hand side. The line makes both a compositional and a semantic connection between the two halves. The butterfly, an emblem of faith, is also encountered, monogrammed and pictured with Mary's floral emblems in a panel on the Marian hanging (fig. 2.18, no. 24 on key), and its position in the composition of the Norfolk panel is strengthened by the association. It forms a symmetrical correspondence with two flying birds on the sterile left, which may consequently be expected to signify Protestant, as opposed to Catholic, faith. The *OED* cites the early modern use of pigeon as 'one who lets himself be swindled [...] as simpleton, a gull, a dupe'; this would support the reading of the stag in the branches as charmed by the music of the satyr's pipe.⁷³ Ripa's emblematic rendering of Adulation provides the key to reading birds, windmill, satyr and stag: all four elements together figure the falseness of Protestant worship from the Catholic standpoint. Following the internal compositional logic of the butterfly/*virtus*/pruning-hook line, the eye is led to examine what is positioned to look as though it were an abnormal fruit on the particular shoot that is being cut away by the scythe of faith and virtue: a twin-towered, moated house with a gateway, the Tudor dynastic house. The arrangement of the emblem's compositional elements makes an implicit reference to scriptural text. In her pruned vine Mary is figuring a version of Christ's words in John 15, 2: 'every branch that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away, and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it that it may bear more fruit'.

⁷³ *OED*, sense 3.b.

Fig. 2.18 Mary Stuart:
'Butterflies' panel,
Marian

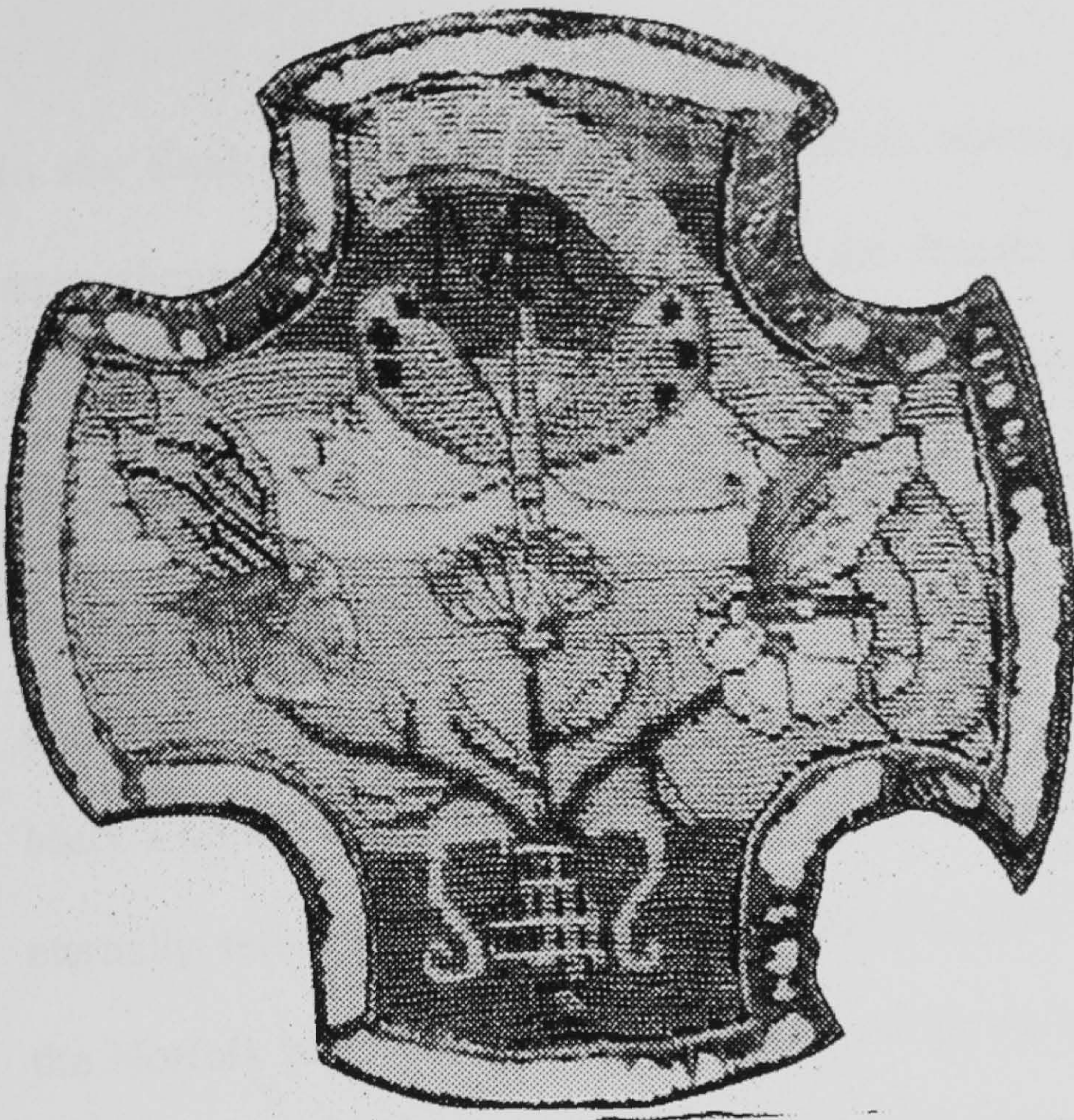


Fig. 2.19 Mary Stuart, 'Turtel
dove' panel, Marian hanging

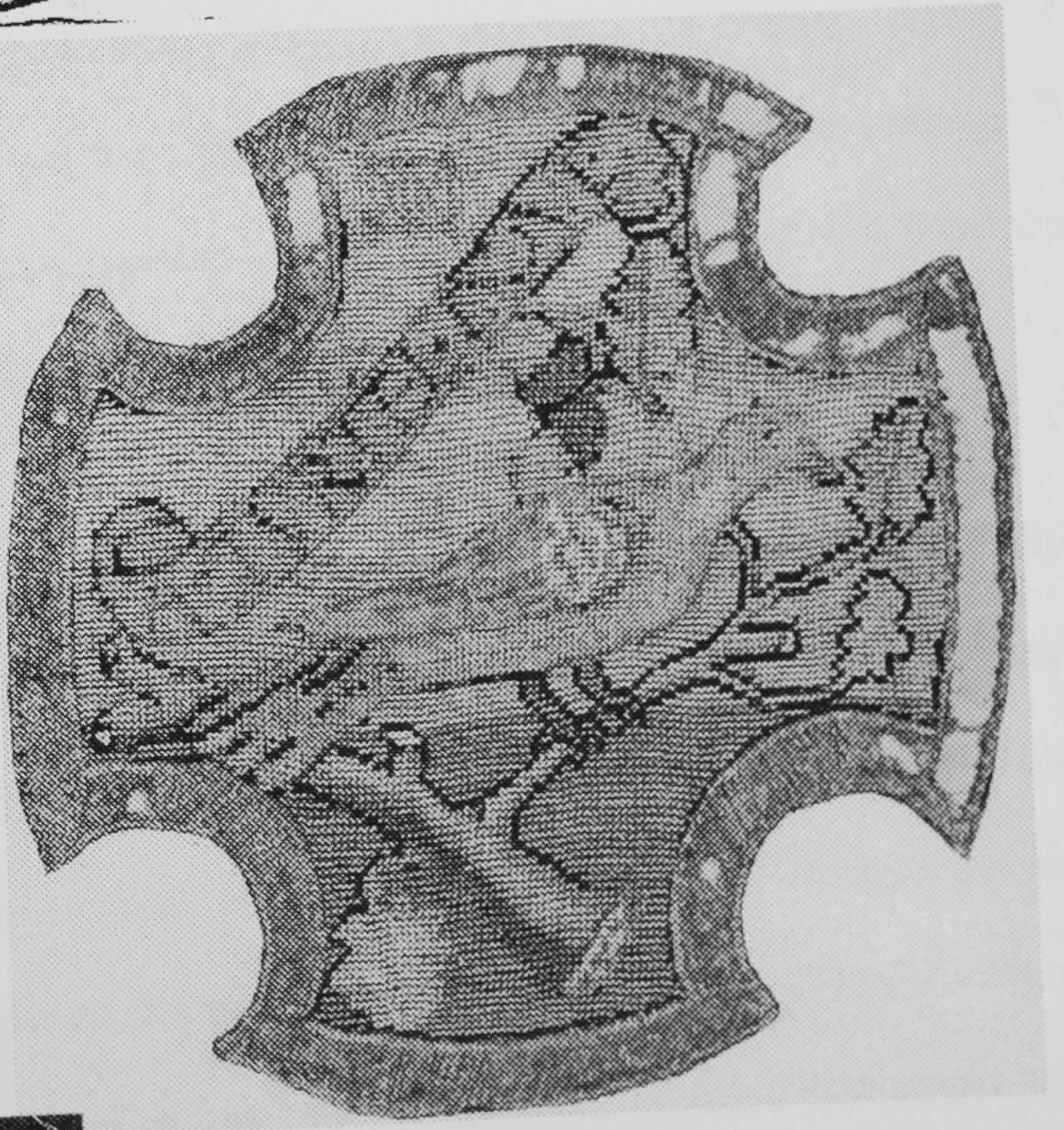


Fig. 2.20 'Beaver' panel on portion of
valance, 4th Oxburgh hanging
(Oxburgh Hall)

In the final analysis, the specific political message contained in the cushion is strengthened by emblematic images of the female body which figure Mary as the archetypal secular and spiritual female. These archetypes are harnessed in an endeavour to 'transcend' Mary's captivity and to claim religious and political legitimacy for herself, her son and her cause. The archetype of the Mother here stresses Mary's generation of an heir within a dynasty, and was later to be an effective instrument in Mary's presentation of herself as a martyr, and even a Christ-like figure, figured as the eternally self-immolating and self-regenerating phoenix or self-sacrificing pelican. In the Norfolk panel this reading is supported by an identification of Mary, the fruitful branch of the vine, with the Christ who prefaced his metaphor of pruning unfruitful branches with the statement 'I am the true vine and my father is the husbandman'.⁷⁴ The figured body of the archetypal spiritual female in the needlework makes good the public absence of an imprisoned, 'invisible' body.

The discovery of the marriage negotiations with Norfolk and the testimony of Leslie, who cited the cushion cover as evidence against Mary, must have necessitated a change in the iconographical presentation of Mary's needlework texts. It is known that this panel dates from the first two or three years of Mary's imprisonment, and that she carried on working with the needle throughout her time in England. The discourse of this text is overt, but no other panel makes such political and religious statements with the same openness. The style of the smaller panels applied to the Oxburgh hangings is far more obscure: Mary dropped the mottoes from her designs and disguised them as natural histories. Her vocabulary became more densely compressed, more coded, and

⁷⁴ John 15. 1.

easier to explain away as something less subversive.⁷⁵

Thus many of the cruciform panels on the Oxburgh hangings also have a recognised religious emblematic significance, as well as meaning on other levels. Multiple significations may be read out simultaneously, although here I am only concerned with religious interpretation. For example, the above-mentioned phoenix also indicates that 'a widow lives for God alone'.⁷⁶ Certainly Mary in her widowhood had turned to the contemplative life, and the turtledove on the Marian hanging reminds us that the 'godly wight [...] to the Lord, in private doth repaire' (fig. 2.19, no. 4 on key).⁷⁷ A beaver mounted on the Oxburgh bed valance bears witness to those who leave worldly things behind (fig. 2.20).⁷⁸ The contemplative attitude finds an echo in a text supposedly written by Mary during her first imprisonment, on Lochleven:

Wherefore art thou sorrowful, my heart? Is it because that art deprived of liberty or of the delights of a court? Take now the wings of contemplation and love, rise above this lake of Leven, fly beyond the seas which environ our isles and learn that there is no prison for the soul enfranchised by God, and that all the world belongs to him who knows how to despise it.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Mary's limited and hostile audience was scrutinising the embroidered surface for signification. This is testified by the unimaginative Nicholas White's inability to interpret Mary's embroidered phoenix impresa (see above, p. 62). See also below, pp. 380-81, for William Camden's account of political interest in Mary's needlework.

⁷⁶ Glossed in a later edition of Paradin, P. S., *The Heroicall Devices of M. Claude Paradin* (London: [n.pub.], 1591), p. 349.

⁷⁷ Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britannia; or, A Garden of Heroical Devises, furnished and adorned with Emblemes and Impresa's of sundry natures* (London: Dight, 1612; repr. Leeds: Scolar Press, 1966), p. 110.

⁷⁸ Alciato, emblem no. 153.

⁷⁹ Recorded in French by Nicolas Causin, Mary's contemporary biographer, in his 'Histoire de l'Incomparable Marie Stuart' in S. Jebb, *De Vita et Rebus Gestis Serenissimae Principis Mariae Scotorum Reginae, Franciae Dotariae* 2 vols, (London: Woodman and Lyon, 1725), II, pp. 53-105, p. 65. This English translation is from *Queen Mary's Book: A Collection of Poems and Essays*, ed. by Mrs P. Stewart-Mackenzie Arbuthnot (London: Bull, 1907), pp. 98-99.

iii: Transmission

The issue of post-mortem transmission of persona was clearly fundamental for Mary Stuart. From an iconographical point of view, she placed great emphasis in her needlework on the generation of her son to succeed her, and the transmission of her sovereignty. But in this Chapter I have been focusing on the development of Mary's programme of constructing a visual and public cult of her martyrdom, and this, too, necessitated planning if it was to be transmitted to a wider public beyond her death. I have considered one major item in this regard, the bed of state, which she bequeathed to James. In her final hours Mary made detailed preparations for the distribution of certain personal articles, and among the most important of these were the items which she would be seen to carry with her to the scaffold. These would reify her death-as-martyrdom and take on the status of relics. Mary's gentlewoman Jane Kennedy managed to retain her prayer book and golden rosary (one of two that Mary carried with her to the block, the other being burnt), as well as her floor-length white veil. The executioners customarily received the ornaments of executed prisoners, but when they went to claim them from the Queen moments before her death, she told them that they would receive monetary compensation for the rosary which she carried, which Mary had bequeathed to Anne Dacres. Dacres was the wife of the Catholic martyr the Blessed Philip, Earl of Arundel and Surrey, and daughter-in-law of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk.⁸⁰ Anne Dacres was thus charged with preserving these mementoes of a Catholic martyr; Anne, who should have been the step-daughter-in-law of the Queen of Scots's planned fourth marriage to Norfolk.

Mary Stuart and Anne Dacres's long-standing friendship is itself memorialised in

⁸⁰ Fraser, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, p. 633.

needlework, in a panel no longer extant which expressed solidarity in difficult times. After his father's execution, Queen Elizabeth was much against the childhood marriage of Norfolk's son Philip, and the young court profligate was for a time extremely harsh and cruel to his wife.

Mary Queen of Scotland and Dowager of France Mother to King James being prisoner here in England [...] and having noticed how wise and worthily the Countesse did behave herself all that time in which the Earl her Husband did by evil counsel absent and estrange himself from her, partly to comfort, partly to shew the love she bore her; for a token thereof, sent her a piece of work in silk and silver made and contriv'd by her self in this form.

There was a tree framed, whereon two turtles sate, on either side one, with this difference that, by that on the right hand, there were two or three green leaves remaining: by the other none at all, the tree on that side being wholly bare: over the top of the tree were these words wrought in silver, *Amoris sorte pares* ['equals by the fortune of love']. Signifying that herself and the Countesse represented by those two turtles were alike in their affections to two persons of the same family, the Duke of Norfolk, and the Earl of Surrey. At the bottom of ye tree on that where the former turtle sate by the green leaves these words were also wrought in silver: *Haec Ademptum* ['this has been taken away'], with an anchor under them to shew that the Countesse whom she put on the right hand, might be in some hope because her Lord was yet alive, tho' by reason of his absence and unkindnes towards her, she mourned as a turtle. On the other side of the tree under the other turtle were these words in like manner wrought: *Illa peremptum* [this has been destroyed'], with certain pieces of broken boards, signifying that her own hopes were wholly wrack'd by the death of the Duke for whom she mourned as a solitary turtle without hope of comfort or redress.⁸¹

This highly emblematic panel seems to have had much the same sort of stylistic

⁸¹ *The Lives of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, pp. 265-67.

conception as the Norfolk panel, although it may date from as much as ten years later. Anne, who had been raised a Catholic by her grandmother Lady Mounteagle, had taken the decision to profess Catholicism in 1582.⁸² The hope expressed in this panel was fulfilled, when Philip himself embraced Catholicism in 1585 and was reconciled with his wife. The panel embroiders a tie between the family, a complex conceit predicated on personal absence (the executed Duke) yet uses embroidered emblems to create a relationship which was itself contingent entirely on the connection of each woman to the (now absent) Duke. The panel argues parity between two women, a present connection based on past hopes. Hope indeed was an element of their shared iconography: another panel (fig. 2.21), perhaps embroidered for Philip during his imprisonment, places hope as the central theme in the composition, with an emphasis on the Catholics' political hope of the Spanish connection in its central motto, *Las penas pasan y queda la speranza* ('sorrows pass and hope survives'). The iconography of this complex composition and its possible reference to Philip Howard has been explored in detail by Margaret Swain.⁸³

The powerful memorialising function of needlework was considered in Chapter One. Mary Stuart would seem to have been exploiting this function to the full. Not only does the carefully-bequeathed surviving needlework bear witness to her exemplary virtue and skill (recovering, through this public memorial, the character that had previously been publicly brought into question), but it also, like the Lewkenor table carpet, preserves and transmits the record of family genealogy which was so vitally important in Mary's claim both to her own legitimacy as a monarch, and (in these closing and cloistered years of

⁸² For Lady Mounteagle's Catholic conduct, and Anne's profession as a Catholic, see below, pp. 201-02, 204.

⁸³ Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots*, pp. 87-88.



Fig. 2.21 Mary Stuart: '*Las pennas passan y queda la speranza*' panel (Victoria and Albert Museum)

her life) to that of her son after her. Close affective bonds between Mary and Anne are both the subject of the turtledove cushion and the object of the bequest itself. Just as the turtledove panel created ties of kinship predicated through the 'fortune of love' on the absent body of the Duke, so the needlework-as-relic recreates in silk thread the threads that are to be cut by the Fates. The needlework works to create a physical, transmittable presence which fills the gap left by the Queen's absent, imprisoned body in life, and her absent, martyred body in death. Anne is charged, by the embroidered claim of hoped-for kinship and the subsequent bequest, with preserving the Queen's memory and with creating the public image of her martyrdom through the transmission of her needleworked relics.⁸⁴

One of the ways that Mary Stuart dealt with the intolerance she faced as a result of her Catholicism was to embroider a response, couching her rebuttal of the terms of her imprisonment in emblematic terms, and creating, through her needlework, the emblematic foundation on which the cult of her martyrdom might be built. The rest of this Chapter will examine the place of religious needlework in the lives of those English Catholics who chose exile or recusancy rather than conformity and renunciation of their faith.

⁸⁴ Margaret Swain traces a very solid line of transmission down the centuries of Mary Stuart's embroidery, through Anne Dacres and her family, in Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots*, pp. 102-03. Anne Dacres was herself known as a needlewoman: her contemporary biographer notes that 'in point of physick and Embroidery I have hear'd her judgement highly commended by persons skilfull in those faculties' (*The Lives of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, pp. 274-75).

III: Catholics on the Continent

The Syon cope preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum is a beautiful example of the English *Opus Anglicanum* tradition, and one of the very few convent treasures which escaped two centuries of plundering and pillaging from the dissolution of the monasteries and the Reformation in England onwards (fig. 2.22). The cope left the country with the Brigettine Syon nuns during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and when the nuns returned from their enforced exile in Lisbon, 250 years later, the cope came too. It is an unusual instance of extant embroidery entrusted to or produced by the Catholic convents. Much must have been produced: according to historian Thomas Fuller in his 1655 *Church History*, ‘nuns with their needles wrote histories also; that of Christ His Passion for their altar-cloths and other Scripture- and more legend-stories in hangings to adorn their houses’.⁸⁵ But the overwhelming majority of articles were destroyed, either during visitations, or during the complicated continental peregrinations of the nuns which mostly ended in destruction during the French Revolution. I propose here to recover the history of these lost articles as far as possible, through the faint traces left in surviving documents and records from the archives of the religious houses, and to trace the history of the practice of convent embroidery inasmuch as it relates to the group of elite women who are the main subject of my study.

In the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods a steady stream of women from prominent Catholic families left England for the continent. Some, like Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria, famous for her ‘curious’ embroidered altar hangings, settled around the Catholic

⁸⁵ Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain from the Birth of Jesus Christ, untill the year 1648*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, 3rd edn, 6 vols (London: Williams, 1655; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1845), III, p. 337.

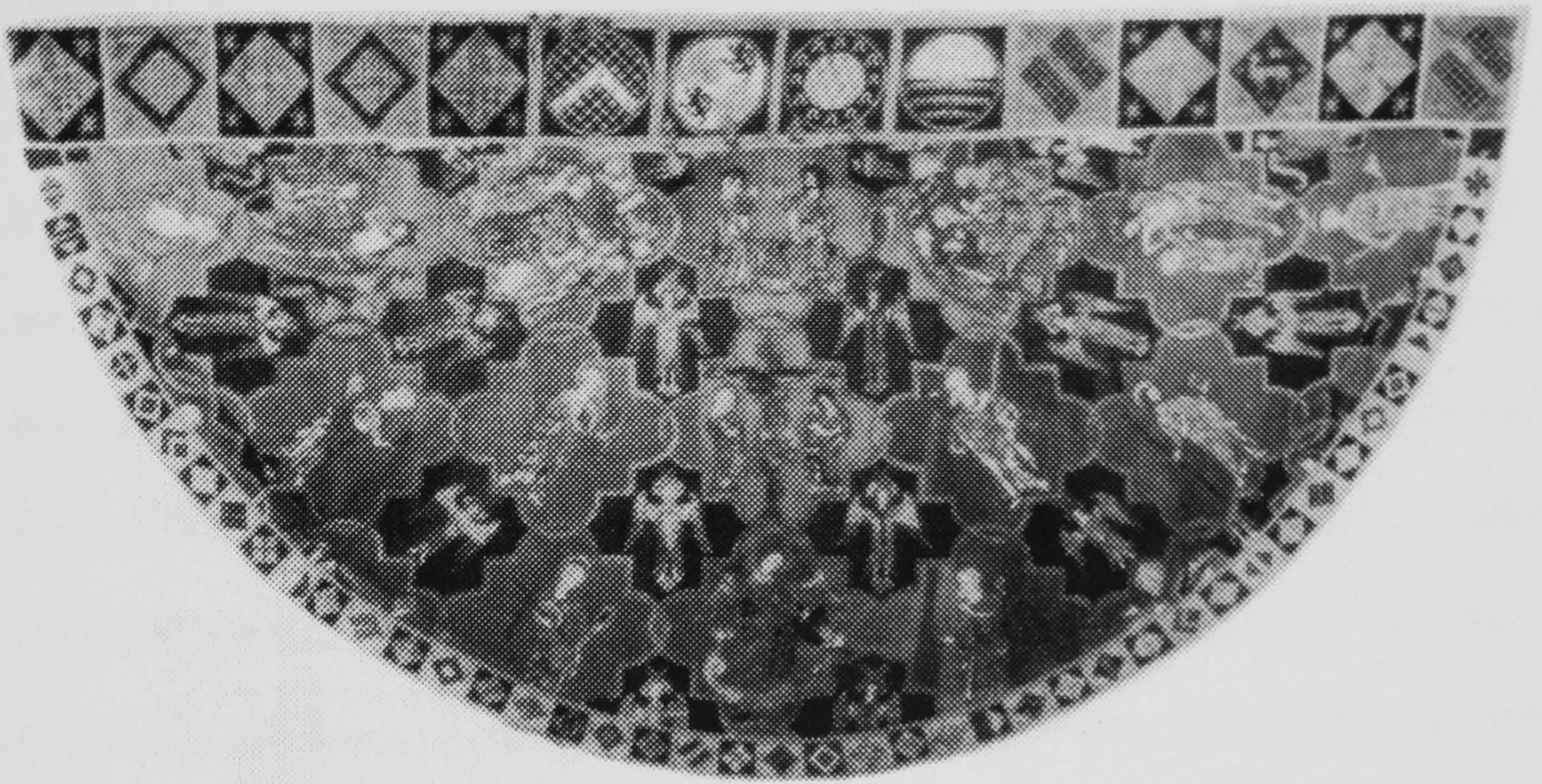


Fig. 2.22 Syon Cope (Victoria and Albert Museum).

courts in Spain and France.⁸⁶ Others joined the growing number of English religious houses which fled persecution in the wake of the dissolution, or which were newly founded during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Edward Petre provides a brief history of all 24 such colleges, collating documentary evidence of their founding and subsequent dispersal. Other research publishes the original documents themselves: the Catholic Record Society, for example, has reproduced much from the archives. The records of those taking the habit, and of death rolls, and surviving accounts of charitable bequests show clearly that the convents were filled with aristocratic women of high status, even late in the seventeenth century. The records of the Benedictines, for example, first at Boulogne and then at Pontoise, list amongst their number Lady Catherine Wigmore, first Abbess of Boulogne. She was the daughter of William Wigmore, esquire of Lucton, Herefordshire, and of Anne Throckmorton, and the records carefully state that she descended from the Earls of Cornwall and the Earls of Pembroke, the Herberts, and was related to Lord Mouteagle and the Vaux family.⁸⁷ The second Abbess of Boulogne, Lady Anna Christine Forster, was the daughter to Sir Richard Forster, Bart., and Chief Treasurer to Queen Henrietta Maria (p. 269). Dame Justinia Timperley was the granddaughter of Sir Henry Beddingfield of Oxborough, and Dame Anna Maria Talbot was the daughter of John, Earl of Shrewsbury and Frances Arundell, the daughter of Lord Arundell of Wardour. Dame Benedict Fitzroy was 'naturall daughter to our latt soueraine King Charles ye 2nd, her mo^r was the Duchess of Cleaveland', and Dame Ignatia Fitz James was 'naturall daughter to our present soueraine King James ye 2nd, her mo^r was Mrs Arabella Churchill' (p. 311). The women brought with them to the convent dowries and gifts: Dame Benedict Fitzroy, for

⁸⁶ Henry Clifford, *The Life of Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria*, ed. by Rev. Joseph Stevenson, *Quarterly Series*, 62 (London: Burns & Oates, 1887), p. 59.

⁸⁷ CRS, *Miscellanea*, Publications of the Catholic Record Society, 17 (Leeds: Whitehead, 1915), x, p. 267. Subsequent references are given in the text.

example, arrived at the Benedictine convent with '7 Albes with a great deale of other church Lennen that was Queene Mothers' [Henrietta Maria], and a silver and gilt ciborium (p. 258).

In addition to high status women in general, whole networks of kinship ties were also transferred over to the continental colleges. In the wake of the Gunpowder Plot, for instance, Lucy Tresham, the youngest daughter of the conspirator Francis, took holy orders, being professed at the age of 17 at St Monica's in Louvain in September 1615 and dying there in 1665, 'Dame Wenefrid'. Ambrose Rookwood's half-sister Dorothea also went to Louvain, and Helena Wintour's younger sister Mary took the veil at St Monica's in 1617. Helena Catesby also became a nun in Flanders, as did Mary, Lady Percy, and Ambrose Rookwood's other half-sister Susanna. Magdalen Digby, sister of Everard, joined the English Benedictines in Brussels, and Mary Ward, niece of the Wright brothers, eventually founded her order of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM). Others in the circle connected with the Plot moved abroad: Lady Catherine Wigmore has already been mentioned, and Joyce Vaux, second daughter of the well-known Jesuit supporter Elizabeth Vaux, tried first the Benedictines, then the Carmelites, and finally settled with Ward at the Poor Clares.⁸⁸

We have a more detailed record than usual of one Catholic woman's efforts to secure permission to leave the country in the first years of the reign of James I. Jane, Lady Lovell, widow of Sir Robert and sister of Elizabeth Vaux, wrote to tell Salisbury of her suspected breast cancer and her desire to spend 'some years' at Spa, near Liège in

⁸⁸ For the emigration of the Plotters' families see Godfrey Anstruther, *Vaux of Harrowden: A Recusant Family* (Newport, Mon: Johns, 1953), p. 375; Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror & Faith in 1605* (London: Mandarin, 1997), pp. 271-73; and Father Thomas Hunter, S. J., *An English Carmelite: The Life of Catherine Burton* (London: Burns & Oates, 1876), p. 6.

Belgium, for treatment under 'the physician holding the Spaue for the most certain cure of this infirmity'.⁸⁹ Her suit for 'leave to go thither for help' included a request for her two daughters aged five and eight to travel with her. Lovell's correspondence with Salisbury, undated but endorsed in the year 1606, give some indication of the trials that beset women such as herself who were planning to travel to the continent to be cloistered. More importantly for this study, it shows that for one woman at least, needlework was an integral part of the expatriation process. The warrants for Lovell's passage were issued on 2 January 1606.⁹⁰ On receipt of them she wrote once more to Salisbury:

Now that I have liberty to depart the land for time to recover health, my suit is that I may have no hindrance in my passage, of which I am put into some fear by a rumour spread abroad of an oath to be offered all as pass the seas out of England disagreeing with a Catholic. If it be so, my Lord, and that it be a general thing from which none are exempted, I wish this licence had not been granted me rather than to have this impediment in my journey [...]. For to deal truly with you, I am resolved to undergo any misery that may be imposed upon me rather than do that thing which a religious and catholic conscience cannot justify.⁹¹

She accompanied her suit (which included a request for the number of servants to accompany her family to be increased from six to eight) with a personal gift to Salisbury of her own needlework:

I have taken the boldness to present you with a trifle of my own work,

⁸⁹ HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, XVIII: 1606, letter 1, p. 419. The precise identity of Lady Lovell is in doubt. Anstruther refers to 'Jane, Lady Lovell, widowed sister of Elizabeth Vaux' (p. 375), but later refers to 'Dame Mary Lovell (Lady Jane)' requesting the Archduke Albert to intercede with James I on Elizabeth Vaux's behalf in December 1611 (p. 394). Henry Foley writes of 'Mary Roper, daughter of John, first Lord Teynham, and widow of Sir Robert Lovell, sister of Mrs Elizabeth Vaux' (*Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus: Historic Facts Illustrative of the Labours and Sufferings of its Members in the Sixteenth Century*, 7 vols (London: Burns & Oates, 1877-84), III: *Second, Third and Fourth Series* (1878), p. 518. Hunter writes of 'Lady Mary Lovell, daughter of 1st Lord Teynham and widow of Sir Nicholas Lovell' (*An English Carmelite*, p. 6).

⁹⁰ Anstruther, p. 375.

⁹¹ HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, XVIII: 1606, letter 2, p. 419.

and if you accept of this, it will encourage me to go forward with some works I have begun that haply will be more grateful to you.

Lovell offers her work and her time, present and future, in exchange for exemption from taking the anti-Catholic oath. We have no record of the nature of the needlework object itself, but object or gesture seem to have been *res non gratae*, and must have been rejected, since in a third letter she writes:

If I committed any errors in my last letters I beseech you to pardon me, and impute it to my want of experience in these affairs. If I had advised myself that this motion for the avoiding of this oath might have been distasteful to you I would have forborne it [...]. I have been much grieved that you would not accept of that mean present I sent, which if you permitted me to send home to your house in the Strand, I should esteem it a high favour. If it be not pleasing to you, then I beseech you give me but hope that when I have finished a work I have begun of more worth and delight, that your lordship will not refuse it of me.⁹²

It would appear that the gift had been refused at court but that Lovell hopes that in the domestic sphere (the house in the Strand) the same gift might meet with a more favourable reception. Despite the harshness with which the requests for exemption must (from the tone of her letter) have been greeted, Lovell appears to be trying again to proffer the same gift once more, to Salisbury in his personal and domestic capacity rather than in his official, court persona. Perhaps the kind of social intimacy denoted by personal reception at the Strand (once again needlework stands as ambassador for the physical body) was the kind of social relationship between Protestant and Catholic in the context of which the Catholic might hope for preferential treatment in matters of politics and faith. As well as appearing to be hazarding the same gift in a different social context, Lovell also introduces the possibility of altering the nature of the gift: by

⁹² HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, XVIII: 1606, letter 3, p. 419.

suggesting that needlework of ‘more worth’ may be acceptable, she attributes the failure of her suit to the unworthiness of the needlework. The ‘worth’ of the needlework is a metonym for Lovell’s own worth, or that of her suit. Worth, of course, might also be understood in a monetary sense: the needlework might include a quantity of gold or silver thread with an established economic value, corresponding to an accepted level of payment for such a political favour as the one she is seeking. Despite Lovell’s protestations of ‘errors’ due to ‘want of experience’, this letter on the contrary indicates some considerable delicacy and sophistication in the aristocratic ‘art’ of mediating social relations through needlework – which in this vexed religious territory becomes a game of very high stakes.

It appears that Lovell received assurance of safe passage; in any case, her fourth and final letter to Salisbury was written from Brussels, taking ‘occasion on this gentleman’s return [...] to present my respects’. Although at this point she has nothing further specific to ask, she again offers the possibility of a needlework gift, and the information that she has not, in fact, used the warrant to journey to the Spa for health reasons as she claimed:

Since there is nothing wherein I may serve you but in my prayers and works, I desire to perform it in the one as in the other; for by reason that I go not to the Spaue till next summer I have much leisure to employ my works, which I would gladly dedicate to your service, though I dare not present them till I know your pleasure, in that it pleased you to refuse the last I sent, being the work of mine own hand. If I may understand that you will accept some trifles which I have and shall work, I will present them.⁹³

The needlework gift accompanying the third letter, then, had been refused both at Court

⁹³ HMC, *Salisbury (Hatfield)*, XVIII: 1606, letter 4, p. 420.

and at the Strand. Lovell speaks of having 'leisure', which she uses as the opportunity to work with her needle. It is not enough that she is filling her leisure with 'work', though, she further needs to justify the time spent by 'dedicating' the work to the 'service' of an individual. Lovell clearly positions herself as subservient petitioner (the repeated desire to 'serve'), but one of aristocratic merit and worth (through the gifts or offers of needlework and time dedicated). Lovell appears to attribute no little significance to the status of objects worked with her own hand, understanding it as an index of aristocratic skill, of leisure time, of service. In this letter she juxtaposes these facets of her identity with a third: her Catholicism. Her prayers are presented as her primary means of serving him, this time, and her needlework a secondary means. We have no record of how Salisbury received the ardent offer of the prayers of a Catholic, and whether they were more acceptable than the (already rejected) needlework. Perhaps here Lovell is extending the offer of a gift preparatory to asking further favours, and coupling it with the offer of prayers since the needlework (which she claims is all she has materially to give) is highly unlikely to meet with success.⁹⁴

Although it appears that Lovell had leisure and finances enough to work gifts of such a high standard that they might be accepted at the English court, the continental colleges, despite the high proportion of aristocrats, were not aristocratic *pensionari*. Many of the continental convents were extremely poor, and some were in dire financial straits, even rejecting postulants for the reason that they could not feed them.⁹⁵ Meanwhile in

⁹⁴ Once in Brussels Lovell 'tried being a Benedictine [...] and then founded a Carmelite monastery at Antwerp' (Anstruther, p. 375). Little else is known of her, apart from the request for Archduke Albert's intercession with James I on behalf of her sister. It was presumably this event that is referred to in a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to William Trumbull, dated 19 December 1616 in which Trumbull is informed that 'as for the Lady Lovell, shee is as forward in her monastery as shee was foure of five yeares since, being a person humerous and inconsistent, not only as shee is a woman but as shee is that woman, the Lady Lovell' (HMC, *Downshire*, Series 75, VI: *Papers of William Trumbull (September 1616 - December 1618)*, no. 167, p. 71).

⁹⁵ See, for example, Peter Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent, 1558-1795* (London:

England contemporary documents illustrate the government's preoccupation over the funds leaving England to support the colleges and convents abroad: the colleges were, as one report to an MP records, 'maintained at the charge of the English Papists, which [sic] carries vast sums of money yearly out of the nation, and returns nothing in lieu thereof, but a sort of vermin, that are a common nuisance to church and state'.⁹⁶ Many benefactors were extremely generous: Dr Nicholas Sanders's sister was a member of a community near Antwerp, and their house was purchased by him and donated for the purpose.⁹⁷ The wealth of the convents came from benefactors but also from dowries. Some were gifts of money, but some were in the form of needlework. We have seen above the kind of high status gift brought by the illegitimate daughter of King Charles II. Other needlework gifts on first taking the veil included 'hangings within ye railes a Carpett for ye Aulter Stepp [...] with a Carpit for ye Communion bench' for the Augustinian Canonesses at Liège from Lady Trevor Warner and her sister-in-law Elizabeth (pp. 8-9).⁹⁸ Sr. Elizabeth Gertrude [Selby] is recorded as making a gift of a 'Communion Cloath' (p. 33). In 1678 the Benedictines at Pontoise were 'by my Lady Tichbore given a flowred satteen suit of church stuffe; and all things compleat to itt; ritchly made up with gold and siluer lace' (p. 257).⁹⁹

As well as gifts presented on entering the convent, which were often very rich and

Longmans, Green, 1914), p. 267.

⁹⁶ 'A List of Monasteries, Nunneries and Colleges, belonging to the English Papists in several Popish Countries beyond Sea' (London: [n. pub.], 1700), in *The Harleian Miscellany: A Collection of Scarce, Curious and Entertaining Pamphlets and Tracts, as well in Manuscript as in Print [...]* (London: White, Murray and Harding, 1808), I, ed. by William Oldys and Thomas Park, pp. 437-39. Partially cited in Guilday, pp. 28-29.

⁹⁷ Guilday, p. 58.

⁹⁸ Trevor Hanmer was the wife of Sir John Warner, who converted to Catholicism in 1664, became a Jesuit 1665 and died in 1705 (see Foley, *Records of the English Province*, VII (1882), art. 2, p. 818). She was professed an Augustinian Canoness on 29 April 1665 at the age of 28, together with her sister-in-law Elizabeth Warner, aged 23. Both subsequently left to join the Poor Clares at Gravelines in July 1666.

⁹⁹ It was, perhaps, a vestment similar to those embroidered by Helena Wintour.

precious, more modest gifts were given by established nuns, sometimes on a regular basis, suggesting that they not only brought items with them, but made them whilst at the convents. In the Benefactors' Book of the Augustinian Canonesses at Liège, for example, Sister Francis [Nandyke] is recorded as having given her order '3 paire of Silke flower Potts' in 1663 and another pair on August 1664. These might well have been the same kind of embroidered slip as the urns with flowers that Helena Wintour made for the Lady Wintour white chalice veil (fig. 2.23) and the White Wintour Cope at Stonyhurst (fig. W.53). The slips were worked individually in the hand and applied to vestments at a later date.¹⁰⁰

The Constitutions and Rule of the Blue Nuns of Paris of 1721 followed the practices of centuries and regulated the nuns' time very closely (as did most orders). Their day included long periods of needlework:

Mass being ended they shall ring to work, to which they shall forthwith everyone repair, & the accustomed prayers at the beginning being said, they shall all work together in silence during one quarter of an hour, but after that, they shall be allowed the freedom of speaking, though softly, till ten a clock and a half.¹⁰¹

Between two o'clock and vespers 'they shall ring to work' again. Benedictines, according to the Rule of St Benedict translated by recusant Alexia Grey in 1632, listened to prayers or 'some short Lesson or reading in some Spirituall book' while they

¹⁰⁰ Other textile gifts to the Canonesses included 'Lane [lawn] for a Surplice for ye Church' from Mother Dorothy [Daniel], and later, 'a lane apron before ye antependare' from the same woman, and a 'fine Holland Aulbe' from Mother Hellene Cary (p. 32). Friends of the nuns also helped directly with the textile furnishing of the convent churches: 'Sr Margarets [Winard] friends a Satine Imbroadered antependium for ye Chapell' (p. 33).

¹⁰¹ CRS, *The Diary of the 'Blue Nuns', or Order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady at Paris, 1658-1810*, Publications of the Catholic Record Society, 8 (London: Whitehead, 1910), p. 281.



Fig. 2.23 Helena Wintour: chalice veil (private collection).

sewed.¹⁰² Some Benedictines must have produced unsuitable needlework objects, however, because the kind of needlework undertaken was regulated:

The Religious must imployin [sic] such labours and Workes as by the Abbesse and Superior shalbee appointed soe that they worke noecurious [sic] vayne, and seculer things for worldly vses, as are purses, Bandes handchercheifs and the like.¹⁰³

Certain nuns had specific tasks associated with needlework: the Benedictine Sexton for example, had a duty of care for the ‘ornaments of the church, the chalice, books, vestments, relics, and wax and annual rents’.¹⁰⁴ Her Syon Brigettine counterpart, the ‘sexteyne’, ‘kept the church ornaments & the altar whole and sound, fair, clean and honest.’ It was she who ‘saw to the washing of altar-cloths, *aubes* or surplices’.¹⁰⁵ But ‘she was not allowed to touch or wash the hallowed *corporals* or cloths with bare hands, but was obliged to wear linen gloves’: an unusual instance of the disenfranchisement of women from their usual responsibilities.

One of the functions of convents in England had always been to teach, and this education, even for young girls not of the aristocracy, included needlework. Fuller, writing his *Church History* in 1655, lamented the demise of the convent schools, saying that in the past ‘they were good she schools wherein the girls and maids of the neighbourhood were taught to read and work [...] if such feminine foundations had still

¹⁰² *The Rvle of the Most Blissed Father Saint Benedict Patriarke of All Munkes* [...], trans. by Alexia Grey, *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works, Series 1: Printed Writings, 1500-1640*; Part 2, 13 vols XIII: *Recusant Translators: Elizabeth Cary, Alexia Grey*, ed. by Betty S. Travitsky and Patrick Cullen (Ghent: Dooms, 1634; repr. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 55.

¹⁰³ *Rvle of* [...] Saint Benedict, p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ Lina Eckenstein, *Women under Monasticism, A.D. 500-A.D.1500* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996), p. 371.

¹⁰⁵ Eckenstein, p. 390.

continued [...] haply the weaker sex [...] might be heightened to a higher perfection.'¹⁰⁶

These early sixteenth-century homespun beginnings of which Fuller wrote had metamorphosed into something more overtly political by the early part of the next century. The ideal which led Mary Ward to found the 'first free school for English Catholic girls governed by women living in the community' in St Omer, known popularly as the 'English Ladies', had crystallised in her mind by 1612, shown in this document in the *Papiers d'Etat et de l'Audience*, held in the Royal Archives, Brussels:

Seeing the necessities of the Catholics in England, and the difficulty they lie under of bringing up their children in the Catholic faith, which cannot be done in that kingdom without great risk to the Children and parents, and desiring to offer themselves to the Service of God, for the education and instruction of such children as Catholics may wish to send to live in these states, [the English Ladies] have settled themselves with the other young English ladies in the town of St Omer [...] and they understand that many Catholic nobles intend to send their daughters to the said town to be brought up as Catholics under the care of the said Ladies, in the faith and good manners, in order that they may either be religious in these parts, or returning to marry in England, may there maintain what they have received.¹⁰⁷

By January 1616 the political situation, 'the state of England' was clearly asserted in a

¹⁰⁶ Fuller, *Church History*, III, p. 366. In John Skelton's mock-elegy 'Phyllyp Sparowe' (c.1505-07, in *The Poetical Works of John Skelton*, ed. by Rev. Alexander Dyce, 2 vols (London: Rodd, 1843), I, pp. 51-94), Jane Scrope, daughter of Lady Eleanor Wyndham, is pictured being educated by the 'Nones Blake' (Benedictines, l. 9) at Carrow, near Norwich. On the death of her pet bird, Jane appears to have embroidered its image into a sampler:

I toke my sampler ones,
Of purpose, for the nones,
To sowe with stytychis of sylke
My sparow whyte as mylke,
That by representacyon
Of his image and facyon,
To me it myght importe
Some pleasure and comforte (l. 210).

¹⁰⁷ *Papiers d'Etat et de l'Audience*, *Liasse*, 446, Royal Archives, Brussels, cited in Guilday, p. 170, and cited in full in Mary Catherine Elizabeth Chambers, *The Life of Mary Ward 1585-1645*, ed. by Henry James Coleridge, Quarterly series, 35, 52, 2 vols (London: Burns & Oates, 1885), I, pp. 273-74.

memorial sent to Rome to be the prime cause of the founding of this controversial institute. The ultimate aim was the reconversion of England, and the schools played a major part in the scheme. When Ward's school came home to London in May 1639, it became 'the centre of Catholic life in the city': 'her school was frequented by the daughters of the best families in the land'.¹⁰⁸

During the eighteenth century, as mentioned earlier, Dissolution devastated the continental colleges in the same way as they had been despoiled in England during the Reformation. In the earlier sackings lead and bells from the roof had been sold, but relics and pictures had been 'packed in sacks and sent up to London to be burnt'. Plate and jewels were ordinarily broken up and melted down rather than being sold, although this also happened in certain instances. One house's 'property in furniture, utensils and vestments were sold there and then' and much was recycled in secular houses.¹⁰⁹ On the continent two and a half centuries later, the same pattern repeated itself, and much of the needlework which is the subject of this present study was destroyed. In the case of the Poor Clares at Gravelines, an account which speaks for itself explains how so much that had been painstakingly kept from the earlier exile, or that had been assembled over the years on the continent, was lost in such a short space of time:

The convent was surrounded with guards, on the 12th of October 1793, and the papers and property of the nuns seized. A few days after this, the commissioners arrived, and effaced all pictures and tokens of royalty and nobility, both within and without the enclosure; and likewise secured all the sacred vessels, vestments and ornaments, and shut up the church and

¹⁰⁸ Guilday, p. 211.

¹⁰⁹ Eckenstein, pp. 454-55.

Dogged attempts to preserve devotional needlework ended mostly in destruction and failure for the Catholics on the continent. At home in England, meanwhile, the recusant families of the exiles preserved, for their part, the ways of Catholicism, developing ingenious ways and means of hiding the vestments which were, for them as for Nicholas Sander, 'living pictures of the passion and death of our Lord'.

IV: Invisible Stitches: The Catholic Recusants

When the justices burst in to Elizabeth Vaux's house in July 1599 in search of popish priests, the Jesuit John Gerard had just set up his altar ready to celebrate Mass.

They came to the room where we were. But straight opposite was the chapel, with a door facing the door of my room on the other side of the passage. The magistrates saw the chapel door open, went in, and discovered a beautifully furnished altar with Mass vestments laid out beside it. Even these heretics were amazed at them (p. 152).

Catholic recusants under James and Elizabeth frequently maintained or entertained priests in their houses, who could hear their confessions, say Mass, and serve as their spiritual directors. At a time when Catholicism was proscribed, the maintenance of a priest in a household necessarily had implications for the way that the house was organised. It affected the domestic, social and even physical aspects of the house, its architecture, for example, being adapted with priest holes and apartments to suit the purpose of priests, or to serve as temporary or permanent chapels. Hiding places for the

¹¹⁰ Edward Petre, *Notices of the English Colleges and Convents established on the continent after the dissolution of the Religious Houses in England*, ed. by Rev. F. C. Husenbeth (Norwich: Bacon and Kinnebrook, 1849), p. 83. It was partly for fear of such destruction that Helena Wintour told Jesuit Father Grey that she wanted to keep her vestments in England. See p. 214 below.

altar furniture, books, vestments and other necessary paraphernalia were also essential, ready to be used at a moment's notice. Despite these precautions, much was destroyed in raids on these houses, and traces of vestments and other church furnishings in the lives of the Catholic recusants living in England are faint. One or two isolated examples of the vestments dating from this time are still extant, and evidence of their production and use primarily remains in the accounts of Jesuit priests like John Gerard, and in the official records of the results of searches and visitations. I intend here to examine the way vestments were used and protected in the Midlands, in the particular configuration of domestic and personal organisation that was the recusant way of life, and will conclude with a detailed examination of a unique set of vestments, produced domestically, which survive.

A number of scholars have expounded the theory that there was a de facto matriarchal system in operation in the early days of recusancy, which led to the maintenance of Catholic households by 'active and proselytising' Catholic wives with conforming, or even Protestant, husbands.¹¹¹ Nor were they operating in isolation: Bossy maintains that the Catholic community as a whole 'owed its existence to gentlewomen's dissatisfaction at the Reformation settlement of religion', and that they played 'an abnormally important part in its early history'.¹¹² Whether or not one would like to go as far as Bossy, there are many records of stoutly active Catholic women, including the redoubtable Lady Mounteagle:

Before the promulgation of the Council of Trent's declaration concerning the unlawfulness of being present at the Protestant Service, Sermons, and

¹¹¹ Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, p. 157.

¹¹² Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, p. 158.

the like here in England; the Lady Monteagle was accustomed to have Protestant Service read to her by a Chaplain in her house, and afterwards to hear Mass said privately by a Priest. But as soon as she understood the unlawfullnes of this practice, she wou'd never be present at the Protestant Service any more. And once urg'd by the Duke of Norfolk with whom she liv'd a while before her death, and at whose house she dy'd, to do something contrary to the Profession of her faith, tho' she much esteem'd and respected him, yet her answer was so round and resolute, that he never mentioned the like any more, but gave her full liberty to have all the assistance desir'd before, and at her death.¹¹³

Lady Mounteagle insisted not only upon private freedom of conscience, but that her religion was to be manifest in the daily actions of her life, to be practised in a public and declarative way, 'professed' as well as proselytised.

The active part played by women in the Catholic community favoured the making and storing of mass vestments, even in a non-Catholic household. An unnamed lady in Gerard's account, for example, 'took to making beautiful vestments' on her conversion, 'and, whenever she had the chance, she gave shelter to priests' (p. 190). Here, whether a public or private act of faith, the sewing of vestments played a part in the articulation, manifestation and profession of this woman's faith. The resulting vestments were the public testament to her conversion, and were felt in themselves to have the power to move and 'amaze', as the experience of the Vaux's pursuivants demonstrates.

Vestment-making-as-practice and vestment-as-object thus have a declarative function, but within the liturgical context the vestments take on further significance. On another occasion Gerard showed one of early hostesses, the mother of Henry Drury of Lawshill,

¹¹³ *The Lives of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, pp. 170-71.

‘some fine vestments, which were a gift to [him], and in this way encouraged the good widow to make others like them’ (p. 24). Her own chapel furnishings, he says, were ‘old and worn and anything but helpful to devotion’. This passing reference serves to show that fine vestments had a practical function in the celebration of Mass. It broadens our sense of the significance of vestments which one critic has interpreted as being used to cheer depressed Catholics up: ‘it would seem that [...] in private houses Elizabethan Catholics were prepared, possibly for the sake of morale, to use vestments and other things which were not strictly necessary for the celebration of Mass. They may have felt that they were preserving what they could of the outward signs of the Old Religion’.¹¹⁴ Gerard’s account serves also to highlight once again that the domestic organisation of the household was the women’s province. This included the generation of textiles, and the above examples show that the almost universal practise of engaging in ‘women’s work’ found a special application for the mistresses of Catholic elite households.

Domestic organisation as a whole was a full-time employment. This made it very hard to sustain the rhythm of the Catholic day in a non-Catholic household, let alone a time-intensive activity such as embroidering complex vestments. This is demonstrated by Gerard’s account of the experience of the Catholic Lady Agnes Wenman of Thame Park, married to a Protestant, who met Gerard on a visit to the Wisemans:

Although she was very anxious to do it, she could not keep a priest in her house. Instead, she arranged to support a priest who could visit her regularly during her husband’s absences. Also, she determined to devote an hour every day to meditation, and, when she had no guests, another

¹¹⁴ P. M. McGrath and Joy Rowe, ‘Imprisonment of Catholics for Religion under Elizabeth I’, *Recusant History*, 20 (1990-91), 415-35 (p. 426). The devotional and liturgical functions of vestments are explored below in the detailed study of those made by Helena Wintour.

one or two hours to spiritual reading [...]. I found she never omitted an hour's meditation or her daily examination of conscience, except on one occasion when her husband insisted on her staying with the guests. Yet she had a large household to keep her busy, and she was seldom without people staying (p. 169).

Women went to extraordinary lengths to preserve the integrity of the Catholic way of life in the strictest secrecy. Bossy reports the case of Lady Falkland, who converted to Catholicism shortly after her marriage, 'but somehow kept the change a secret from her husband for twenty years; when it got out, in 1625, he separated from her and tried to stop her having anything to do with her children'.¹¹⁵

A biographical account of the life of Anne Dacres, Lady Mounteagle's granddaughter, illustrates something of the practice of secret Catholicism that must have been common.

She took the decision to profess Catholicism in 1582-83:

By the help of one Mr Richard Bayly a Catholick gentleman who belong'd to the Earl her Husband [who at the time was a Protestant], she brought it soon after to effect. For having found out a grave and ancient man made Priest [...] he brought him privatly to the Castle of Arundel. [...] Her reconciliation to the Church, and meeting with the Priest [...] [was] done with as much privacy, and kept as secret as was possible, the times beginning then to be very troublesome. And therefore because she had no Catholick women about her at that time, nor others whom she durst acquaint with the busines, she was forced to go alone at an unseasonable time from her own lodgings, by certain dark obscure wayes and dangerous passages to the chamber where the Priest was lodged, there to make her Confession, it being thought both by Mr Bayly and her self that otherwise it could not possibly be done without discovery, or at

¹¹⁵ Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, p. 159.

least great danger thereof.¹¹⁶

This account shows the danger inherent in maintaining a Catholic faith in even a small community like a household. It seems that it was not unusual to have a mixture of Catholics and Protestants amongst the servants, who at any time might denounce the Catholics to the authorities. John Gerard recorded the events of a two-day search at Braddocks on 1 April 1594:

The first thing they did was to shut up the mistress of the house in her own room with her daughters, then they locked up the Catholic servants in different places in the same part of the house. [...]

The justices went off thinking that I must have left the house on Easter Sunday. Some pursuivants remained behind to take the mistress of the house [Mrs Wiseman] and the Catholic servants, men and women, up to London to be examined and imprisoned. They were going to leave the other servants, I mean the non-Catholics, to watch the house. The traitor was one of them (p. 59).

Whilst Lady Wenman's duties as a housewife threatened to stand in the way of her daily observances, another episode related by Gerard indicates how the practices of hospitality at the time also allowed a priest to be maintained undiscovered in a mixed household:

After [the Lady Grace Fortescue] had been received, I converted other people in the house, and recommended her a Catholic maid-in-waiting, and, finally, suggested she should have a priest permanently in her house [...]. There was no need to make his presence generally known, as mine was in the house in which I was staying, where all were Catholics. Here a priest could live comfortably at the top of the house, and as she now

¹¹⁶ *The Lives of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, p. 182-83. Anne worried that the Earl would discover her secret faith, 'for it cou'd not, as she thought, be long conceal'd from him' (p. 184). Bayly was subsequently turned in by the inhabitants of Arundel for recusancy, and accused of being a seminary priest. Although acquitted he had to leave the country for Flanders, where Anne Dacres often sent him money.

had some Catholic servants, Protestants could be kept away from him (p. 162).

A shared proscribed faith seems to have been the basis for strong community life: Bossy concludes that the gentry (and especially the women) played a crucial role in the formation of a Catholic congregation and community, as has already been remarked. Catholicism, as opposed to Protestantism, preserved the traditional forms of charity and hospitality; social historian Felicity Heal argues that Protestantism 'contributed to a fundamental redefinition of charity, and hence of the nature of household giving and entertainment' (with the 'institutionalisation of charity at the hands of both the benefactor and of the state'), principally because the tenets of Protestantism changed the nature of thinking about charity (the nature of salvation, priesthood in all, denial of the efficacy of prayer for the dead and so on).¹¹⁷ Catholics, on the other hand, 'did not have any scruples about indiscriminate charity or about the traditional cycle of feast and fast to overcome, and, at least by the later years of Elizabeth's reign, they were motivated by a conscious desire to maintain customary social patterns as a means of consolidating communal behaviours'.¹¹⁸ Amongst the women this stance was supported by one of the classic 'paradigms of virtuous female behaviour', service to the community.¹¹⁹ Magdalen Dacre, wife of Viscount Montague and whose kinswomen included the Dormers, 'maintained a great family, which consisted of eighty persons and sometimes more', to 'support them in the Catholic tradition'.¹²⁰ Her inclusive version of hospitality

¹¹⁷ Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 122-24.

¹¹⁸ Heal, p. 169.

¹¹⁹ Heal, p. 179. Heal cites the Petre family household books (p. 171) as displaying patterns of hospitality which demonstrate this.

¹²⁰ Richard Smith, *An Elizabethan Recusant House, comprising the Life of the Lady Magdalen Viscountess Montague (1538-1608)*, ed. by A. C. Southern, trans by Cuthbert Fursdon, O.S.B. (London and Glasgow: Sands, 1954), p. 39. Lady Montague provided 'strong Catholic rallying points' at her three houses until her death in 1608. Indeed, her house at Battle Abbey was known as 'Little Rome' (p. 43).

was considered better than charity,

for in this kind of alms only money is given, but in the pious liberality of this lady, not only money is bestowed, but meat, lodging, defence from persecution, the exercise of religion, and the use of sacraments, and a visible church or company of Catholics is assembled and conserved.¹²¹

Within the Catholic moral system, the maintenance of traditional practices of charity and hospitality is conceived of as being a 'pious' act, in other words, a moral duty.

Similarly, it was a moral duty to maintain the 'visible church'. Although some Catholics accommodated themselves to attending Protestant services, the recusants maintained that interior, private profession of the Catholic faith had to be externalised and celebrated. Catholicism, with its emphasis on visual articulation, necessitated the equipment of the 'visible church'. Anne Dacres was one who rejected proscription and embroidered for the Church. Her biographer records the 'church ornaments of her own making and contriving', which were 'much admired' in the close community that was the Catholic circle 'for their rich, rare and curiouse workmanship'.¹²² Details of these works have unfortunately not been transmitted, but other records preserve lengthier descriptions of the kind of textiles worked and protected by Catholic recusants.

The Vaux family, despite the financial problems caused by recusancy fines, had a well-appointed chapel:

our vestments were both plentiful and costly. We had two sets for each colour which the Church uses; one for ordinary use, the other for feast days: some of these latter were embroidered with gold and pearls, and figured by well-skilled hands (p. 383).

¹²¹ Smith, *An Elizabethan Recusant House*, p. 40. The account records that Magdalen Dacre was also 'accustomed to spend much time in sewing shirts or smocks for poor men and women'.

¹²² *The Lives of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel [...] and of Anne Dacres, His Wife*, p. 220.

Some idea of what these might have looked like is provided by Helena Wintour's peasecod vestment, figured all over with gold and pearl-embroidered peasecods (see fig. W.33 below). That these sets of vestments were often complete and extensive is shown by an undated inventory (circa 1606) listing relics and vestments associated with the Vaux sisters Anne and Eleanor (Brooksby), sisters-in-law to the young widow Elizabeth Vaux:

for churchstuff a vestment of cloth of silver and embroidered cross upon it, stole and maniple of the same. Item a vestment of cloth of gold, stole and maniple. Item a cope of the same. Item two tunicles [dalmatics] of purple. Item a taffeta vestment with an embroidered Jesus. Item an altarcloth to that with letters about: these two things were Mr Page's the martyr.¹²³

The altar cloth might have been a similar style to those Wintour vestments which are also decorated with 'letters about', the sacred 'IHS' monogram, or others, or even words and phrases from the Mass (figs. W.50 and 59). The conservation of textiles associated with a martyr was typical: the Museum of Lancashire has a vestment associated with St Edmund Arrowsmith.

The Vaux family also had in their possession older, family vestments, showing that the Reformation had up to this point failed to make a clean sweep of the church furnishings. In 1612 when Elizabeth and her son Lord Vaux were arraigned and found guilty of refusing to swear the Oath of Allegiance, the goods confiscated included 'two crimson copes left by the ancestors of the house, worth £100'.¹²⁴ The fate of most of this haul was probably typical: of 'the rich altar furniture, plate and vestments' seized 'in the

¹²³ Anstruther, p. 386, citing State Papers 14/19, no. 2. 'Letters about' might correspond to monograms of the kind embroidered by Helena Wintour, especially on the Lady Wintour black vestment (see fig. W.50).

¹²⁴ *Vaux Peerage Case before the House of Lords* (HMSO, 1836-7), p. 202, cited in Anstruther, p. 406.

King's name' on their arrest and brought to London together with Elizabeth, the textiles were all that was permanently lost. The rest of Lord Vaux's property was returned to him the following year. Some textiles were also returned to him, and it may be that they were not ecclesiastical in function; the authorities seem not to have been able to decide finally the designation of some items. Privy Council records for 14 May 1614 show that one Pickering had that day delivered

four small parcels of plate, being the remaynder of divers other parcels heretofore delivered [...] and belonging all to the Chappell, together with six borders wrought with needle worke in gold and silver, with two other borders wrought with greene silke, and gold, a square cloath wrought with gold and pearle, and one white laced handkercher, which their lordships comaunded to be kept in safety untill further order should be given for the same.¹²⁵

The overwhelming majority of the records which survive associate women with the vestments, either making them, supplying them, or making provision to hide them. In my research one account only records the active involvement of a man (apart, of course, from the Jesuit missionaries), although it cannot surely have been so rare an occurrence. Sir Thomas Langton of Newton-in-Makerfield in Lancashire was a notable and very vocal convert, who instructed those attending his deathbed

to see that certain purple and red robes of his were turned to use at the altar — he had received them from the king when he was made a Knight of the Bath [by King James]. The investiture of this Order takes place only at the anointing and coronation of the king [...] and he wanted the robes with which he had been invested at the Coronation to be devoted to the use of the altar (pp. 183-84).

¹²⁵ *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1613-1614*, ed. by H. C. Maxwell Lyte (London: D. S. I. R., 1921; repr. Nendeln, Lichtenstein: Klaus, 1974), p. 439.

The provenance of the textiles is meticulously stated. Gerard is careful to record (his Jesuitical account stressing the 'devotion' of the act over benefaction) how Langton, like the Queen of Scots, re-used state robes to dress the church, thus heretically implicating the state machine in worship at a Catholic altar at the very moment of its ultimate temporal consecration.¹²⁶

Such vestments were bulky and highly visible. Existing family chapels were fitted with secret storage space. In one corner of the Packingtons' chapel at Harvington Hall in Warwickshire, for example, 'Massing Stuff' was hidden under two floorboards.¹²⁷ The chapel still has its original wall paintings, dating to around 1600, of large red and white drops to symbolise the blood and water of the Passion. Secret rooms, priestholes, were built into the existing fabric of buildings. A piece of tapestry and a fold-away leather altar were found in one such late sixteenth-century chamber discovered in 1858 at Coughton Court, home of the Throckmorton family.¹²⁸ In the Winchester home of Lady Mary West, widow of Sir Owen West, searchers discovered in December 1583 'another place, more secret, vaulted underground', where they found 'a chest bound with iron, wherein were all kinds of Massing apparel [...] needlework cloths upon velvet for the altar'.¹²⁹ An inventory of material discovered during a raid on Samlesbury Hall in Lancashire listed 'imprimis, one canabie to hange over the alter founde in a secrett

¹²⁶ Lord Vaux, crippled by recusancy fines, was in no position to undertake a similar donation. In a letter to Burghley dated 18 February 1593, he excused himself from attending Parliament on the grounds that 'my parliament robes are at pawn to a citizen, where I have offered large interest (unable to disburse the principle) to borrow them for some days, also offering my bond with surety to redeliver them. Nevertheless I cannot obtain them, albeit yesterday I did write to the Lord Mayor of London to friend me therein' (BM Lansdowne MSS 73, fol. 26, cited in Anstruther, p. 219).

¹²⁷ Michael Hodgetts, 'The Priest-Holes at Harvington Hall', in *Transactions of the Worcester Archaeological Society*, 39 (1962), 1-15 (p. 5). I am grateful to Jackie Thomas for this reference.

¹²⁸ Anon, *Coughton Court: Warwickshire* ([London]: National Trust, 1988), p. 15. A paliasse bed and a rope ladder were also found in the compartment in 1858.

¹²⁹ Michael Hodgetts, 'Topographical Index', Part 1, *Recusant History*, 16 (1982-83), 146-216 (p. 164).

vawlte over the dyninge chamber'.¹³⁰ Stripping of the family altars during the Restoration must have been effective, since in the early days of the Jesuit mission, Gerard found most houses unprovisioned:

at first I used to take round with me my own Mass equipment. It was simple but fitting and specially made so that it could be carried easily, with the other things I needed, by the man who acted as my servant. In this way I was able to say Mass in the morning wherever I happened to lodge. [...] My hosts could seldom provide the essentials for Mass and I therefore had to bring them myself (p. 40).

Later on in his narrative he describes these portable clothes. 'Though light and easy to carry about, they were beautifully made from red silk embroidered with silver lace' (p. 184). But in testimony to the effectiveness of the Mission and the underground community,

after a few years there was no need to do this. In nearly every house I visited later I would find vestments and everything else laid out ready for me. Moreover, before very long I had so many friends on my route and so close to one another that I hardly ever had to put up at a tavern in a journey of a hundred and fifty miles (p. 40).

Some justices swept down onto households so fast that the Catholics had no time to hide their equipment. Whilst much was taken, the Jesuits record instances of miraculous lacunae in the searches. Father Garnet wrote of one occasion at the Vaux's house, where the pursuivant

was completely blind to the most obvious significance of what he had touched. [...] A pursuivant picked up a silver pyx for containing the Blessed Sacrament, and put it down again at once as though it was the most ordinary thing in the world. Before the very eyes of another lay folded a dalmatic of great value, and yet, though he unfolded everything

¹³⁰ Hodgetts, 'Topographical Index', Part 1, p. 168.

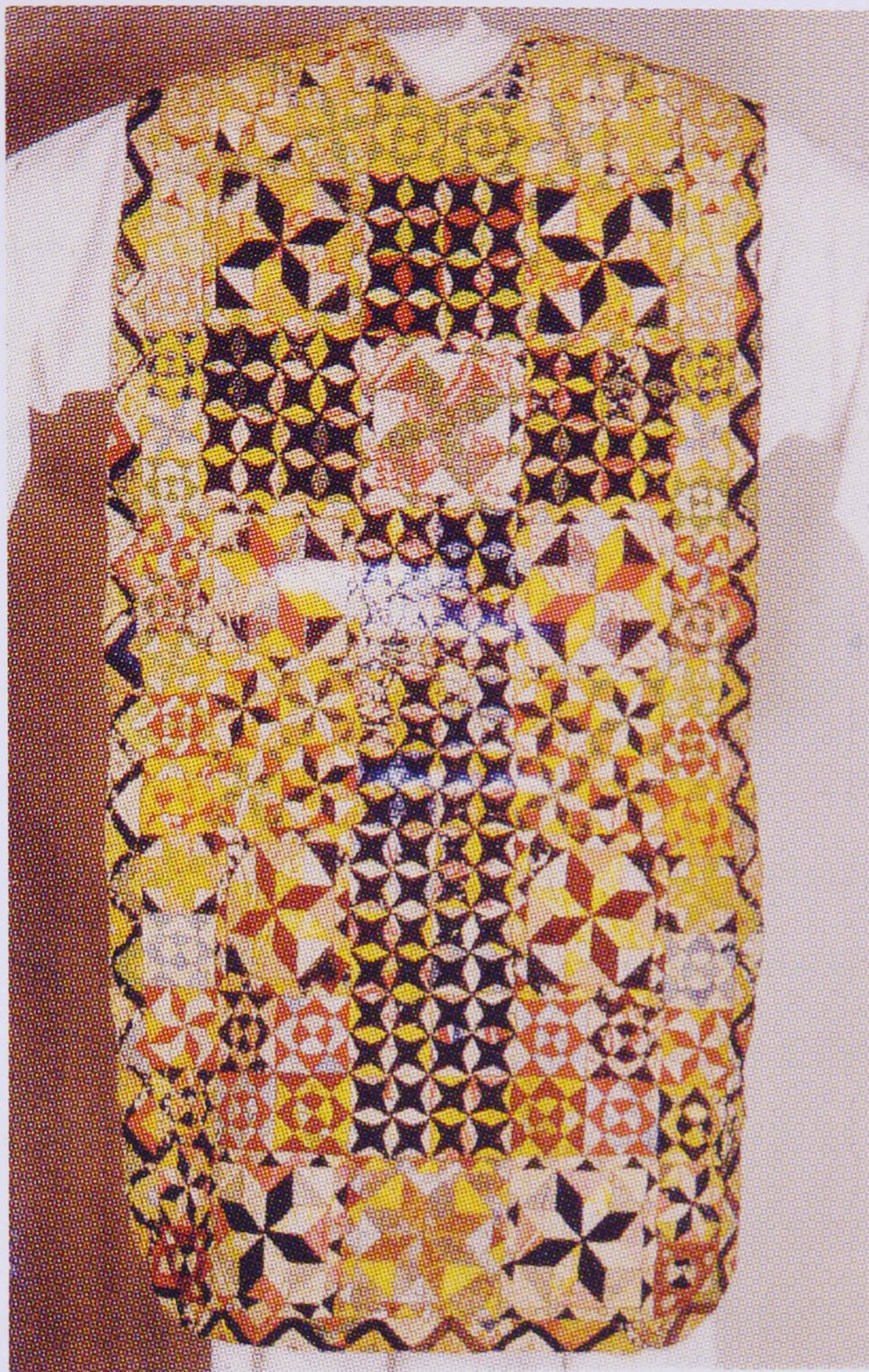


Fig. 2.24 Pedler's Vestment, 16th or 17th c. (Wardour Chapel)

else he never even touched this.¹³¹

A sixteenth or seventeenth century dalmatic that has survived may provide an explanation for such an oversight (fig. 2.24). Made of patchwork diamond shapes, the geometric patches are pieced together to form the subtle shape of a cross when the overall design is seen whole and unfolded from a distance. Clearly 'camouflaged' as a domestic quilt, it is easy to imagine how a searcher might pass over this vestment if it were folded and placed with other household linen, looking for more sumptuous textiles, the cloth of gold and silver, the silks and the lace mentioned in other accounts.¹³²

If this sort of dalmatic is extrapolated as being representative of quite another type of vestment than those we, too are accustomed to look for, then such disguised or coded articles might have been common in the recusants' habitual practices of secrecy. The Jesuits adopted covers for their journeyings: John Gerard, for example, went about in the guise of a falconer. Hawking and hunting also served as a coded metaphor for the mission itself: the Jesuits hunt for harts/hearts. In needlework, the recusants may have produced objects which paralleled their coded writing style, a form of dissimulation 'in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only.'¹³³ Thus, it might reasonably be expected that the visual imagery associated with devotional writing might be employed in devotional needlework: the recurring images of hunting in Sheldon tapestries of this time come to mind (fig. 2.25), as does a large bed in Carlisle's house with an embroidered valance bearing enormous slips of Catholic floral emblems the lily, passion-flower and tulip. Unfortunately the scrupulous absence

¹³¹ Stonyhurst, *Anglia* I, p. 73, cited without further reference in Anstruther, p. 190.

¹³² This vestment, known as the 'Pedlar's Vestment', is held in the collection of All Saints Chapel, Wardour.

¹³³ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), pp. 25-26.



Fig. 2.25 Sheldon tapestry valence with hunting detail (Victoria and Albert Museum)

of explicit documentation makes even identifying such pieces with known recusants impossible, let alone proving their specifically devotional use.

The traces of recusant vestments and textiles are faint, often surviving only in accounts written from a strongly partisan perspective such as that of John Gerard, or in brief inventoried lists. Very little is known about the production of such textiles which are extant, and in cases such as the Sheldon cushion covers where production is known, no information is available on their use. Despite this, the records do show a stubborn refusal on the part of the Catholics to practise their religion without its paraphernalia. There is, however, one surviving set of vestments that can be attributed to an individual member of the Catholic laity, working in a period of relative tolerance towards Catholics in the middle of the seventeenth century. Helena Wintour's vestments, studied in the following Case Study, make iconographical connections between embroidery and the devotional literature of her time which support the theory that earlier Catholic recusant textiles and vestments may have drawn on devotional metaphors for their woven and embroidered imagery.